The CAPTAIN'S DAUGHTER

GWENDOLEN OVERTON

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"THERE WAS A DEEP SILENCE, THE SILENCE OF THE HILLS."

The Captain's Daughter

BY

GWENDOLEN OVERTON

AUTHOR OF "ANNE CARMEL," "THE HERITAGE OF UNREST," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

FRANCES D. JONES

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GENERAL

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NOTE

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GENERAL

ILLUSTRATIONS

" There was a deep silence, the silence of the hills " . . . . . *Frontispiece*

PAGE

" Marian stood stiff with fear " 57

" ' I'm sentry, . . . I can't leave my post ' " . 167

" ' You ain't disbelieving me, Captain ? Sure ye ain't ? ' " 179

" He rose to his feet, and stood looking down at her " 225

" He gave Marian the pleasure of telling him again " 263

The Captain's Daughter

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CHAPTER I

Haggarty was coming down the line. So Marian waited for him. She could have mounted, herself, well enough, for that matter, even though Natchez was restless and dancing around in circles. She had been accustomed to those little whims of his for a matter of five years, and to other whims in other horses for some ten years before that. But she felt that she was getting too near to young-ladyhood to scramble on any way at all, before such eyes as might be watching — in the garrison. Beyond the garrison — well, that was another matter.

So she waited for Haggarty to come up,

which he did, saluting. Then he took Natchez' bridle close behind the shanks of the curb and held him with a grip of iron, while Marian put her foot into the big palm and sprang into the saddle. She stood in the stirrup while he settled her skirt.

Now Haggarty was particular about the hang of riding skirts — more especially when the skirt was Marian's. He was also particular about the folding of saddle-blankets and the set of a saddle-cloth. Neither, in this case, suited him.

"Who saddled yer horse?" he asked, regarding uneven edges of gray blanket with marked disfavor, as Natchez, being free of the great hand near his chin strap, began twisting his beautiful, glossy black body around in circles again. Marian tried vainly to keep him still.

"Story, I suppose," she said. Story was the Norrises' striker, and Haggarty had small use for him. There was only one striker who was the sort of striker that Haggarty really approved — and that was Haggarty.

"Yer blankets wasn't folded like that when I was strikin' for the Lieutenant," he observed. "You never saw the edges spreadin' three inches apart and the corners pointin' in every whicht way, then. And yer saddle-cloth was properly brushed." He flicked off an infinitesimal horsehair from the blue.

Marian smiled. "Well, it wasn't father who discharged you, Haggarty," she reminded him. "You grew tired of us. You left of your own sweet will."

It was not entirely kind of Marian to say that. It was true, so true that it

destroyed the old soldier's grievances. And an old soldier is as much entitled to his grievance as to his extra pay.

Haggarty shrugged his shoulders. "Oh! he was growin' tired of me, the Lieutenant was."

Marian's father had been a captain a matter of a dozen years, but it was only officially that Haggarty saw fit to remember it. In ordinary conversation he was the Lieutenant still, as he had been in the days when the raw young Irishman had joined his troop.

"I don't believe so," said Marian, easily. "I don't believe he was, and neither do you." She had argued it so many, so very many, times with Haggarty before, that the interest had somewhat waned. And Natchez was dancing to be off.

Haggarty's face was very long — and

the longest face on earth can be that of an injured Irishman. "Sure and he was," he said conclusively. "Let's see you go off, Miss Marian."

She set Natchez to a fast canter up the line for Haggarty's amusement; and, as he watched, his face grew pleased in spite of himself.

It was he who had taught the girl to ride like that. He had started with her before she had been quite two years old, leading her around a certain army post in a desolate alkali flat — first upon the back of his own horse, afterward upon that of her own burro, advancing her little by little until she had been equal to the management of pretty nearly any horse that came her way.

Natchez was not a bronco. He was a splendid, arching-necked, wide-flanked

black, which the brother of Chief Natchez had possessed himself of by means that would perhaps not have borne investigation, and had given to Marian in exchange for a gayly illustrated and colored linen-bound edition of "The Three Little Kittens." There was not a handsomer horse on the frontier, and there was not a better rider than Marian.

Haggarty, as he stood watching, congratulated himself upon the latter indisputable fact. Then, as the black horse with the slender, erect figure upon it disappeared around the angle of the quarters, he turned away and caught sight of Story, who was coming out of Captain Norris's house.

Haggarty had left the Norrises' service a number of years before, but he looked upon his right to interfere and to keep

things running straight, as in nowise lessened. So he went up to Story and gave that good-humored young American some points as to the folding of saddle-blankets, and as to the duties of his position in general.

He was severe, but Story was amiable, and Haggarty's reputation of troop crank was unassailable. The lecture was accepted with the respect which became a youth in his first enlistment, and Story went on his way. Haggarty, looking glum, went his; which — since dinner-call had just sounded — was to the barracks. And Marian went her own way, jumping the wide acequia in front of the sutler's store, and keeping out along the road.

She was on her way to meet the ambulance which was bringing her mother back to the post.

Mrs. Norris had been on a visit to California for a couple of months. The ambulance had been sent the thirty miles to the railroad for her and for Major Beveridge's nephew, who was coming to stay with his uncle and to see the "real thing" in the way of the Wild West.

Marian rode out far beyond the barbed-wire fence which marked the confines of the reservation, on and on along the road, fording the creek, which was high with the late autumn rains and the melted snow from the mountains; and presently she came to the top of a divide. She halted there, waiting.

Natchez was quieter now. He stood still, getting his breath, with even swelling and sinking of his sides. There was a deep silence, the silence of the hills, where there is no living thing save per-

haps a cow in the distance, moving down some trail to the creek, a squirrel whisking about the gathering of acorns from scrub oaks, or a hawk drifting high in air. A wind blew from the snow mountains far away in the west. It streamed out the horse's black mane and tail, and the loose strands of the girl's golden hair.

The ambulance was coming along the flat below, and an escort wagon was following some distance in the rear. The dust rose up and hung and spread behind them both. Marian remembered that recruits were expected to-day. Probably the men in the escort wagon were recruits.

Soon the ambulance was so near that she could hear the rattling of the traces.

She turned Natchez out of the road. The four mules came tugging up the hill and the ambulance drew alongside.

She leaned far out from her saddle; so far that the young fellow on the front seat instinctively put out his arm to catch her. She took her mother's hand. But Natchez was nervous. He objected to the proximity of the wheels. So Marian let the hand go and moved a little farther away.

The young fellow on the front seat was watching her horsemanship with much admiration. Mrs. Norris introduced him. He was Louis, Major Beveridge's nephew, as Marian had supposed. They talked together for a while.

Then, the foot of the hill being reached, the driver put the mules to a trot. The dust raised was by no means to Natchez' liking. It got into his quivering red nostrils, and, for that matter, got also into Marian's nose and mouth and interfered

with speech. The road was narrowing. She turned out, and went skirting it, well into the open. Now and then when she came to a coyote hole she jumped it, and once she took a log that lay in her way.

Louis Beveridge was more than ever impressed. "By Jimminy!" he ejaculated, "she can ride."

It would have been strange had it been otherwise, Mrs. Norris told him. "She was not quite four years old when she went on donkey-back from Thomas to Apache; across the White Mountains and through Rocky Cañon."

He guessed that the feat was worth telling, but he was new to the land. "From Thomas to Apache," meant nothing to him — and as for Rocky Cañon, of that all but impassable roadway he had never heard.

Once Marian fell behind, to see what manner of men the recruits in the escort wagon might be. Then she gave Natchez the rein, and was back in the garrison before the leaders of the ambulance had reached the reservation line, a half-mile outside.

It was more than a week later that she undertook to do the honors of the post by taking Major Beveridge's nephew down to see the only amusing thing that offered just then, — the riding drill of the new recruits.

Marian herself liked Louis well enough. He was a handsome youth, though he showed the effects of the strain that overstudy had brought about and which had caused him to be sent to the West for a year of outdoor life at the very time when he should have been beginning his junior

year at college. Also there was not much of anything which he knew how to do. At least that was how Marian phrased it — but it meant simply that he did not know how to ride.

Except for that, she found him more companionable than any one else in the garrison and they got along together very well. Which was a good thing, as they were the only two young people in the place.

Haggarty had his doubts. Not that he had spoken to young Beveridge or had been within a hundred feet of him. He mistrusted "tenderfeet" on general principles, and the inhabitant of a city was to be looked upon with suspicion until he had proved himself of some use in the world — or in what Haggarty understood to be the world.

So Haggarty, considering it his duty to pass judgment upon the company that Miss Marian kept, and having some minutes at his disposal before it should be necessary to begin the training of the recruits, dismounted from his sorrel, slipped his arm through the bridle-rein, and walked over to where the two stood on the outskirts of the drill ground, leaning against the cannon.

Now Haggarty had ridden for over twenty years. His legs, as a consequence, had the cavalry bend. To put it in plain English, they were bowed, and very bowed. It was only upon horseback that he presented a good figure. When he walked, he was not graceful at all.

His advancing form struck young Beveridge as being very funny. He said as much.

Marian stiffened from head to foot. It was one thing for her to treat Haggarty with levity; it was quite another when any one else — and especially a civilian from the East — had the temerity to do so.

Haggarty had been good to her mother before she herself had been born. It was Haggarty who had carried her out into the terrible southwestern midsummer sunshine for the first time. She was not going to have sport made of Haggarty. And she gave Louis Beveridge to understand as much. He checked his laugh.

If Haggarty was funny from Beveridge's point of view, Beveridge was funny from Haggarty's. Beveridge's face was somewhat pink and white, whereas Haggarty's was a deep sienna red, which all his long life on the frontier had never brought down to a quiet and enduring tan. To

all appearances he was chronically suffering from a new and painful attack of sunburn. But he liked faces that way, much better than ones of the tenderfoot's pallid hue.

He objected, upon the same grounds, to Beveridge's hands. He would have been glad to be able to object to Beveridge's figure, but there was no denying that that was good, — erect, square-shouldered, strong, and straight-legged.

Haggarty resented the legs, — he was vaguely conscious of a slight defect in his own, — and he resented that he had seen Marian with Beveridge several times in the course of the last week. His was a jealous soul. There had been a time when Miss Marian had cried lustily if "Haddarty" had gone from her sight, and he was of opinion that it should be somewhat that way now.

He acknowledged the introduction remotely, raising his cap — you did not salute a tenderfoot. It was clearly impossible to express views concerning civilians to this one, unless properly cloaked, at any rate. So Haggarty cloaked them. He spoke of the new recruits. It was not in complimentary terms. They were raw, they were green, they were street urchins — mostly. He failed to see how they were to be taught anything that a man worth calling a man ought to know. They were never going to learn to ride — never. He had given up all hopes of that.

Marian reminded him of perhaps half a hundred other batches of raw recruits of whom he had given up hopes in times gone by.

"Those ones learned," she encouraged

him; "perhaps these ones will, after a while, if you're patient with them."

"Patient with them!" said Haggarty, mockingly; "it's patient with them I have need to be. I had them out yesterday. You'd have thought I'd had the backs of them horses clipped and waxed down with tallow candles — they slid off that slick." The nose of the sorrel was poked over his shoulder as he talked, and he stroked it, going fiercely on.

"One of them in particular is the biggest sissy of the lot, — Creighton, his name is, — little gutter-snipe that enlisted in New York." Haggarty was quite aware that Beveridge was from New York. For that matter, he was himself, — he had enlisted there two years after he had come from the old country, — but he chose to ignore the fact just now. He went on about Creighton.

"You watch for him," he said. "You'll know him — long, lank, white-faced city kid with curly hair; hangs on to his horse's neck for dear life, and tumbles off when he looks at a hurdle."

He might have kept it up longer, as Beveridge's much amused, tolerant smile was exasperating, but just then the recruits came in sight from the stables, advancing slowly, with little ease.

Haggarty saluted Marian, lifted his cap to Beveridge, put his foot in the stirrup, mounted, and trotted away.

As the recruits came nearer, Marian looked for Creighton among them. She picked him out.

"That's the one, I expect," she said. It was the only one who answered to the description at all, but he was not exactly what the old soldier might have led one

to suppose. He was a fairly well set up man, with a good enough face, which was only, perhaps, a trifle weak. Marian rather took a fancy to him.

Beveridge looked at him for a moment; several different expressions went over his own face. "Why, what in the *mischief*—" he stopped short.

"What is it?" asked Marian, turning to him.

There was a puzzled frown on his forehead. "Nothing," he said—"nothing of much account, that is; I was just remembering something."

Marian was not prying. She let the matter go. And besides, she was interested in the recruits — particularly in Creighton.

Haggarty was dressing them down quite terrifically. It appeared to scare them all very much and to send a couple of them

off their horses from no other cause than sheer trembling.

"And he's as mild as a lamb, when it comes to that," Marian defended him against Beveridge's possible misconstruction. "You ought to see him with a baby or a dog or a sick cat. Once he went right into a camp of hostile Indians to shoot a wounded horse they were leaving to suffer."

But there was nothing mild about him now. He was putting the luckless recruits through their paces with the best of a will. They sat astride their bare-backed horses as well as they could, trotting around and around the elliptical track. Now and then one lost his balance completely, made a wild lunge for the mane, or flung both arms around his horse's neck, before he slid to the ground.

The horse would stop in his tracks and wait patiently. He was probably a gentle animal who had in his day suffered many a recruit to learn the rudiments of horsemanship upon his broad back.

The least gentle of them all, however, appeared to have fallen to the lot of Creighton. It was a raw-boned speckled gray, with a neck which curved the wrong way, and great length of nose. It looked ugly tempered, and it was. Marian knew it of old. Its reputation was that of a bolter and a shyer. She spoke of it to Beveridge.

"It seems a pity to give him to any one who doesn't understand his ways," she said. "He is very uncertain. I have seen him bolt at mounted parade. You can never be sure what he is going to do next."

But almost any one could have told that it was going to do something tricky and unmanageable now. Its ears were lying back and its upper lip was drawing up from the long, mean, yellow teeth. Once it kicked out with a little squeal. But Creighton rode a trifle better than most of the others, and managed to keep his seat.

There was a stack of low hurdles in the centre of the track. A halt was called, and they were brought out and placed across the road at intervals of a good many yards.

Then the drill began again, and recruit after recruit went tumbling into the dust as his horse took the little leap which was hardly more than a step, after all.

But Creighton got over his first two hurdles, if not gracefully, at least in safety;

and it was plain that he was beginning to think he could ride, when suddenly the gray stopped, its forelegs planted out, its ears flat, its eyes showing a vicious white. It had consented to take the other hurdles, but this one it refused.

Creighton gave an urging kick in the ribs. It was not a hard one, but enough to finish the temper of the uncertain beast, which shut its big teeth fast on the bit, swerved at a sharp angle, and began to run.

Creighton's knees clung instinctively to the bony sides, and his hands grasped first at the mane, then, in another moment, at the long, awkward neck itself.

The horse was making straight for where Marian and young Beveridge stood. As it passed the cannon, the recruit caught sight of Beveridge. His face set in fear. His hold relaxed.

Beveridge saw it. "Stick on!" he called. "Stick on, whatever you do, Levering!"

Marian caught the name. "Levering?" She looked up, surprised.

Beveridge flushed with a quick annoyance. "Creighton, I mean," he answered shortly. "I can't be expected to remember all their names." He was watching the runaway. He started forward. "It's all up with him now," he exclaimed. And it was as he said.

Haggarty's dog, a truly wonderful cur, had been investigating some snake or gopher hole at a distance from the cannon. It heard the horse coming toward it at a run, pricked up its ears and tail, and darted forward, barking with all its might.

It was the finish of the gray's exasperation. It gave a plunge to one side, combining a shy, a rear, and a buck, a remarkable

movement which might have unseated a *vaquero*. Creighton was flung into the air and fell head foremost into a pile of broken bottles and old tin cans. The horse stopped for just an instant, gave a sidewise glance with the wicked, white-rolling eyes, and kept on with his run.

But the new recruit was lying quite still.

CHAPTER II

THERE was bad feeling between Marian's dog and Haggarty's. There had always been, and it was the more unfortunate that they had to see a good deal of each other.

Marian's dog was named Puggy-Wuggy. He was a Willoughby pug, and small and dark, as such a one should be. He was very aristocratic, and behaved himself accordingly. Never for one instant did he forget his pedigree — which was English and respectable.

Haggarty's dog resented this. He was anything but an aristocrat. He was of unknown breed and unusual appearance. He was all white, except for his head, which had the coach dog's spots, and the extreme

tip of his tail, which was dark brown. The effect produced was peculiar. But a soldier does not love a dog because of his ancestors. And this dog was bright. His name was Skeezicks.

Now there had been frequent disagreements between Puggy-Wuggy and Skeezicks, but thus far they had never gone beyond a few snaps and snarls, and serious trouble had always been averted just in time. As a rule, moreover, Puggy-Wuggy was kept out of Skeezicks's way, shut up in the house whenever Haggarty and Skeezicks came around. Naturally his feelings suffered from this. It hurt his dignity, and dignity — despite his mussed little black face and curled-up tail — was Puggy-Wuggy's strong point.

Things were gradually coming to that pitch where a fight was inevitable. Puggy-

Wuggy did not shrink from the fight. He was possibly one-third the size of Skeezicks, but valor does not go by inches. There was bulldog blood in him, and it showed in the outthrusting of his lower jaw. He bristled for the set-to.

Skeezicks, upon his side, was not seeking trouble, but he was ready to do his part should the occasion arise — as finally it did.

Puggy-Wuggy went over to the troop quarters all by himself, trotting straight across the centre of the parade ground, with determination in the very set of his extremely short and wrinkled neck. He had been told never to leave the officers' row; to stay about his own house preferably, but never under any circumstances to go to the barracks. The soldiers knew this, and whenever he disobeyed rules they sent him scurrying home.

This afternoon, however, the men were nearly all away at the target-range, and there was, at the moment, no one upon the front porch except Creighton — in bandages and court-plaster yet, and showing deep scars still blue and red. He was to come off the sick report the next day, but this afternoon he was still, officially, an invalid unfit for duty, and at liberty to wander about the post at his will. He had had a narrow escape and had been in the hospital for a matter of two weeks.

Skeezicks was also on the front porch, and his temper was bad just then. Haggarty had sent him home, believing that the rifle-range, where recruits were learning the first principles of target practice, was no place for so valuable an animal, who would, moreover, rush into the forefront

of danger if a prairie-dog raised its head above its mound.

Skeezicks saw Puggy-Wuggy coming. Puggy-Wuggy saw Skeezicks prick up his ears and rise. As for Creighton, he did not know anything whatever about the state of affairs, nor even that Miss Norris's dog must always be sent straight home again. He snapped his fingers to call him, instead.

Puggy-Wuggy disregarded it. His pop-eyes were fixed upon Skeezicks, and upon nothing else. Skeezicks jumped down from the porch and advanced slowly to the middle of the road. Puggy-Wuggy came up to him. As has been said, the situation was not understood by Creighton, who was new to the post, and only took it all as a joke. He believed in dog-chivalry, and the barracks dog was so

very much larger than the officers' line one, with its little mincing airs. Skeezicks, he thought, would never think of consenting to fight so tiny an antagonist.

But Puggy-Wuggy's small black face was thrust up into Skeezicks's speckled one. His little lower teeth showed savagely, the rims of his eyes were red, — even as the eyes of his bulldog ancestors had once been red, — and his tail was in a quiveringly stiff curl. He growled. Skeezicks growled back. He made a jump and a snap. Skeezicks did the same. They drew off, seeking a point of vantage to attack.

"Sick 'em!" said Creighton, looking on it as a joke still.

But it was not a joke. They took him at his word, and the fight was on, — growls, howls, snaps, rolling, tumbling,

tearing. Puggy-Wuggy's very smallness stood him in good stead at first. He was under and over and around Skeezicks, nipping him here, hanging on to him there.

Creighton thought the situation far too funny to spoil. He stood up and leaned against a pillar and urged Puggy-Wuggy on. "Go it, Shorty!" he encouraged; "swallow him whole! eat him up! make a meal of him! Sick 'em!" Puggy-Wuggy did not need the incentive — but in another moment he needed help. Skeezicks had him down and was getting a hold on his neck.

Creighton had no intention of letting the Captain's dog get hurt, but he was rather fond of fights of the kind, and he did not want to interfere at once. Puggy-Wuggy was yelping and biting at one and the same

time, beside himself with rage. But in another instant the yelps stopped short. Skeezicks had him by one of the folds of his neck, which gave a magnificent tooth-hold, and was shaking him until he was only a blur in the air.

Creighton decided that it was now time to interfere, more especially as he saw the men come running from the other barracks. He went to the rescue. But it was not so easy to separate the combatants. It took four soldiers to do it. And directly the grip of Skeezicks's jaws was loosed, Puggy-Wuggy, nothing daunted, turned on his enemy again. Skeezicks was dragged struggling into the troop clerk's office, and Puggy-Wuggy was gathered up into Creighton's arms, still growling with anger and whining with pain, and carried to his home.

Creighton delivered him to Marian, and

together they examined his wounds. There were a number of them, and they were pretty severe. Creighton, whose own body had been so recently cut up by broken glass, as Puggy-Wuggy's was now by Skeezicks's teeth, had a very good notion of how the small dog must feel. There were bandages in his pocket, also a bottle of white vaseline. He brought them out.

"I've got these things," he said; "the hospital steward gave them to me, to bandage myself and save him and the nurse time. I guess we'd be putting them to a good use if we tried some first aid to the injured here."

His tone was not altogether as respectful as Marian might have liked. She noticed it. It was a trifle flippant and familiar. But then — he was new to the service and its ways. And he meant well by Puggy-

Wuggy, which was the main thing just at the present time.

"Can we wash off the blood, somewhere?" he asked.

"We might take him to the kitchen," she said. "The cook is out."

So they took him to the kitchen and washed his cuts in a bowlful of tepid water. He did not like it at all. The castile soap smarted, and the water tickled when it ran down among his hairs. He wriggled and he kicked; but Creighton held him gently, yet firmly withal.

Then they took him back to the sitting room. They put him on the lounge, and Marian soothed him while Creighton spread the vaseline on the wounds and wrapped the bandages around his poor little legs and the lacerated, stubby neck. It was a piteous-eyed and much-swathed pug that resulted.

Creighton stood off and laughed at him. Marian's smile was of the sort that her father was wont to describe as "having a string tied to it." The funny part of it was not very clear to her.

The mad and the heroic were quite gone out of Puggy-Wuggy now. He settled down into his mistress's arms with a whimper, as she made ready to carry him upstairs to his own special basket in her room.

"I've got to see the Captain," said Creighton, as she started to go. "He said I was to come over sometime before retreat."

The Captain was not in at the present moment. But he would probably be back soon, however. Creighton could wait.

"He's only gone over to the saddler's to see about a pistol holster, I think," said Marian.

"I'll wait then," Creighton told her.

So he waited — and he waited, moreover, in the sitting room, the which he would not have done had he been more accustomed to the ways of a post. He would have gone out to the hall or to the porch. But he was only a recruit, and he did not understand many things. Besides, just then he was winding up the bandages that remained. Puggy-Wuggy had entirely undone them with his protesting struggles.

It was rather a slow process. While he was engaged in it, he heard some one come up the steps, cross the porch, and go down the hall with a quick stride. He guessed it to be Captain Norris; and in a moment more he knew that it was.

The dining room opened off the sitting room. There were heavy double portières of Navajo blankets hanging between.

These were partly drawn together, but there was still enough space for one to see through.

The sitting room was darkened. But in the dining room the shades were up and the sunlight was streaming in. So it happened that though Creighton, from where he was, could see Captain Norris perfectly, Captain Norris, even had he looked, could not very well have seen Creighton.

But he did not look. He went straight to where, between two of the windows, there stood a heavy quartermaster's desk. He stopped in front of it, took out of his pocket a handful of silver and a few pieces of gold, counted it out in small stacks, swept all the stacks together again, and took from another pocket a bunch of keys.

Creighton went a step nearer, tiptoeing, keen, watching with all his eyes. The Captain stooped down, unlocked the second

of three small drawers in the side of the desk, put the money into a little wooden box, which had not even a cover, and locked the drawer again.

Now he would come into the sitting room! Creighton drew sharply back and went on winding the strips of cotton again. But Captain Norris was evidently in haste. Almost before Creighton could realize it, he had gone down the hallway, the front door had banged behind him, and he was already upon the board walk.

The bandage was rolled. Creighton stowed it away and stood listening. There was not a sound in the house, save only that of Miss Marian walking back and forth in her own room just above. The floors of contract-built houses were thin. Creighton could hear every step she took. He went to the door and looked up and down the

hall. There was no one about. And Miss Marian had said that the cook was out.

As for Mrs. Norris, Creighton, from his place on the barracks porch, had seen her get into her phaeton and drive away, over half an hour before. And as for Story, if Story was around, there were certainly no signs of him. He would risk that. It was probable that Miss Marian was the only person left in the house. She was still moving about up above. So long as that continued, all would be well enough. Creighton came back into the sitting room, pushed aside the portières, and went through. He started quickly for the desk.

At that moment a door in the kitchen opened and shut. Some one — a man — was coming toward the dining room.

There was no time for Creighton to go back. He dropped to his knees and slipped

under the table, which was covered to the floor with a big fringed and embroidered cloth.

The fringe was still swaying suspiciously as Story, carrying an armful of wood, came into the room. But Story did not notice it. The logs were piled so high in his arms that his chin was forced into the air. He could not look down. He went through into the sitting room, and Creighton, crouching beneath the table, could hear him piling the wood in the wood chest, slapping the splinters from his palms and blouse, and coming back. The striker was taking his own good time. It was evidently his opinion that there was too much sunlight coming into the dining room. He drew down the shades a little way, and was at much pains to get them exactly even, one with the other. At his every step the floor shook, and so did

Creighton, enough, he could not help thinking, to make the table dance.

But finally the shades were arranged to Story's satisfaction. He went out and closed the door after him.

Creighton hesitated, then crept forth. As he did so, he saw Story pass by the windows toward the barracks. Now, at last, the coast was clear.

Creighton had his theory. He had noticed that though the second drawer, into which the captain had put the money had been so carefully locked, the drawer above it was not only unlocked, but open a very little way.

Now the chances were rather better than good, that this desk was built like most such pieces of furniture, and that there was an opening between the upper and lower drawer, of which Captain Norris had never

chanced to think. It was worth the trying, at any rate.

He listened one last time. All was well. Marian was still stirring around upstairs. Creighton drew out the upper drawer. The wood stuck a little. It had to be humored quietly, which was exasperating. But it was out at last, and the contents of the little wooden box in the lower drawer were full in view, and in reach.

The man's hand was quivering with eagerness. He set the drawer he had pulled out upon the floor. The sight of the little wooden box, with its silver pieces and its gold, had excited him to the point of forgetting everything else — of forgetting even to listen for the footsteps on the floor upstairs.

They had stopped. Marian had put Puggy-Wuggy safely to bed. He was as

comfortable as cotton wadding and his little blanket could make him. He had been offered crackers, but had turned from them with a sigh. If he did that, he must be feeling very bad indeed.

Marian began to be worried about him. Perhaps just washing and anointing and bandaging had not been enough. Perhaps something was broken or injured somewhere inside of him. She sat down to rub his head, and see if he would not go to sleep. Having his head rubbed was Puggy-Wuggy's idea of bliss. But this time it failed to content him. He moved about restlessly and tried to get up.

Marian lifted him in her arms again and began to walk up and down with him. She knew that he did not fancy being cuddled, ordinarily. That he seemed to now was all the more proof that he was very miserable.

But presently he tried to get down. She set him on the floor. He walked stiffly toward his basket, stopping every foot or so to survey his bandages with a disgusted air.

If he had not been so pathetic a figure he would have been comical. Even Marian realized that, much as she pitied him. He whined to be lifted into his basket. She put him in. He stretched out the bandaged legs that would not bend, and went to sleep.

Marian made sure that he was oblivious of this world of sorrows for the time being. Then she bethought herself of the book she had been reading when Creighton had rung the door-bell and brought in the worsted hero. What had she done with it? She must have left it in the sitting room. She started to go down for it, walking lightly, that Puggy-Wuggy might not be jarred and awakened.

The sitting room was empty. She had supposed it would be. If she had thought about the matter at all, she would have taken it for granted that when her father had come in he had spoken with Creighton, and that both of them had gone out again.

As she came to the middle of the room she heard a faint sound in the dining room. She stopped. She was standing in the very same spot in which Creighton had been standing when he had seen Captain Norris counting the handful of cash. The portières were just as they had been then. So she, too, saw what was going on at the desk, saw the private kneeling, the top drawer on the floor beside him, saw him putting his hand through the opening and taking out a lot of silver. He slipped it into a

pocket of his blouse with the most surprising dexterity. It was so quickly done that she could almost have doubted that it was done at all.

Creighton waited an instant, looking around. Marian stood stiff with fear. But he did not seem to see her. He put in his hand again and brought forth a little more money. It went the way of the rest. Then he took up the drawer and slid it into place. He was even very careful to leave it just a trifle open.

Marian was thinking quickly. She was very thoroughly frightened. If she had been less so, she might not have made so many mistakes.

They were the troop funds that Creighton was taking. Her father always kept them there until they were in large enough amounts to be worth depositing in the

"MARIAN STOOD STIFF WITH FEAR."

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sutler's safe. He had done this for years. It would be serious for the troop funds to be missing.

But she dared not stop it now. There were very few things she was really afraid of — but she was afraid of a burglar. It was quite probably because she had never had the very least experience with one before. If Creighton were to see her now, she thought, — if he were to guess that she had seen *him*, — he might do anything. He might even kill her. Burglars sometimes killed people. She had read of it.

Creighton was coming toward the sitting room. Before she knew what she was doing she was behind a heavy window curtain, pressing far back, holding in her skirts, trying to stop the thumping noise of her heart.

She was sure that Creighton must see

her, even as it was. She could see him perfectly. He had pushed aside the portières and come back into the sitting room. He stood there in the middle of the floor, peering around him, listening.

Marian tried not to breathe. She saw him glance up at the ceiling, and she guessed that he was wondering whether or not she was still on the upper floor. He seemed to be uneasy at hearing no sound, and he peered around the room again.

But either Marian was well hidden, or his eyes were not accustomed to the half-light. At any rate, he still did not see her. His composure began to come back.

Creighton stood still in the middle of the room. He took the bandage roll from his pocket, deliberately unwound a good deal of it, and deliberately began to wind it up again, taking considerable pains.

It was evidently his intention — if Marian was coming downstairs — to be found peaceably repairing the havoc her dog had wrought, not sneaking hurriedly out of the house. His coolness was astounding. His hand was perfectly steady. Marian noticed it. Her own hand was shaking hard.

Was he never going to go? He would hear her breathing soon. She would make some move, and then —

But Creighton was far from being in a hurry. He took his own good time with the strip of cloth. When he had rolled it all up once more, he went out into the hallway and looked around. But there was no one in sight.

He came back to the sitting room. His eyes stopped at the window. Marian's heart stopped too. The eyes passed

on. The heart went again in big, wild bumps.

Creighton crossed over to the lounge, and took up his forage cap. From there, when he should face about, Marian would be in full sight. She braced herself, head up, ready. The fear had reached that point where she was brave again.

But Creighton did not face about. Without another glance he went out into the hall and walked down it slowly. He opened the back door with a good deal of noise, and shut it with an intentional bang.

Marian came out from her hiding-place, and ran into the dining room. There was a window which looked out upon the back yard, and she could see Creighton sauntering down to the gate with his hands in his trousers pockets. Presently he broke

out into whistling. The back gate stood open. He paused there a moment and looked back. Then he turned to the right and was gone.

Marian stood staring at the gate posts a while. Then she considered the desk. Her own life was safe — for the moment, — but the rest of the trouble was just begun.

CHAPTER III

MARIAN came out upon the front porch. Her face was very white, her eyes were wide, and her hand shook so that she could hardly turn the knob. Any one might have seen that she was badly scared. But Beveridge was far too much excited over something else.

As she had come hurrying out of the lonesome house, meaning to call the first officer that passed and have Creighton arrested, Louis had come running up the steps. He was all but breathless. Had she heard the news? For the instant her own was driven out of her head by the question.

"It's an outbreak," he announced;

"a band of Hot Springs has left the reservation."

He was not a little proud of his glibness with the terms. The keen interest went out of Marian's face, nevertheless. There had been two or three outbreaks a year, rumored or real, during the sixteen years of her life. It was hardly to be expected, in view of that average, that she should show very much concern.

Beveridge felt that his effect had failed. It was his first experience of the sort, and his enthusiasm had been a good deal aroused. His own face fell a trifle.

He persisted, nevertheless. "They've killed a whole family of ranchmen," he said.

Marian pursed her lips incredulously. Maybe they had — and then again, maybe they hadn't, she told him with the supe-

rior wisdom of much experience. "They always start rumors like that. Sometimes they're true, and generally they're not. And they are almost always exaggerated. Why, I remember once at one of the posts the hospital steward's little girl came rushing down to tell me that the Indians were trying to kill her family, — and the Indians were twenty miles away. That's how frightened they can get sometimes."

"Well, anyway," he stuck to it, bound to have the worth of his news, "they're sending out troops from here."

"Troops," she wanted to know — quite annoyingly unmoved still, "or *a* troop?"

"*A* troop," Louis was obliged to admit, feeling that the bottom was falling entirely out of his little effect. "'D' Troop," he added.

As "D" Troop was not her father's,

Marian's interest grew even less. "All of it," she inquired, "or just a detachment?"

It was just a detachment. How was enthusiasm to last, brought into contact with this matter-of-fact? How was one to impress a girl who apparently ranked an Apache outbreak with a dress parade?

It was probable, however, that Marian's interest in the outbreak would not have been so small if her interest in Creighton's theft had not been so great. Apaches on the war-path had come — more or less remotely — into her experience, before. To have caught a thief in the very act never had. A band of Hot Springs a good many miles away were by no means so terrifying as a live burglar in the very same room with one. She preferred at that particular moment to talk about burglars.

Nevertheless her excitement about that had received a slight check. And she felt she had been too cool about the question of the Indians to show agitation now. She conceived the idea of being exceedingly cautious and diplomatic. So she took Louis over to a corner of the porch where they might talk at leisure.

It was well into the autumn, and the leaves were quite gone from the crow's-foot vines which, in summer, screened the porch. But the days had been warm, and the hammock and some chairs were still in their places. Marian sat herself in the hammock, and Louis stretched out in a long leather chair, cut and stamped elaborately by the post saddler, as a Christmas present to Captain Norris's daughter.

Louis was willing enough to drop the subject of outbreaks, for the present. He

felt that he had "showed the tenderfoot." And Marian was anxious to get to the subject of thieves. But she did not want to go at it directly. She had some doubts about telling the story to a civilian first — when it was so evidently an official affair. Besides, she knew that Louis had an excellent opinion of her courage. She did not want the opinion to lower. And she was aware, too, that her conduct in this particular case had not been quite brave.

A pause ensued.

It was Louis who broke it, and who led up to the subject for her — at one and the same time.

Marian's hair was very long and very thick, and just now it was done in a long cable of a braid. She had the braid over her shoulder, and the end of it in her hand, as she balanced to and fro in the hammock.

Louis looked at the braid and smiled.

"Golden-Locks," he remarked.

That was her opening. The subject of gold once brought up, it was not so hard to lead around to that of money, and from there to the matter of thieves. Marian managed it rather cleverly, forcing the issue a good deal, to be sure; but Louis was not on the watch for anything, and he did not suspect.

"What would you do," asked Marian, "if you were to go into a room suddenly and find a thief there — find him stealing things? If the thief didn't see you, I mean?"

"Unless he happened to be bigger than I am, — or better armed, — I rather think I'd prevail upon him to put the things back and clear out."

"Yes," said Marian, leaning eagerly

forward, "but if he *were* bigger — or better armed — would you call somebody to catch him?"

"Depends," said Beveridge, judicially — "depends on the kind of fellow the thief was. If he were just an ordinary burglar, of course I'd try to have him caught. But if I knew something about him and thought he wasn't generally such a bad lot, I expect I'd give him the chance to put the things back, first. You might as well give every fellow his chance." Louis was tolerant and easy-going. "You can't always tell what the temptations may have been. Sometimes men steal to help those who are dependent on them."

From which it may be seen that for all that followed thereafter, Louis was not a little responsible. He had put an entirely new idea into Marian's head. She had

had no notion of letting Creighton go unarrested. She had meant merely to wait until her father should return and then to tell him quietly, so as to make no fuss about it.

But here was another view of the case. And as it was a rather sentimental one, it naturally appealed to a girl. The only difficulty was that a girl's judgment is not likely to be heavy enough to balance the sentiment. It struck Marian as a lovely, charitable idea.

"Yes," repeated Louis, considering what was — so far as he knew — a purely imaginary case, "I'd give him his chance. He might perhaps reform and turn out a very decent sort of chap. Whereas if you had him arrested first thing, he'd be tried and jailed, and he'd never stand much show of leading an honest life after that, — un-

less," some recollection seemed to come to him, "unless he should skip the country and assume another name."

Marian sat thinking. Then she took her resolve. She would let Creighton have his chance. He was such a pleasant-faced young fellow — and he had been so careful of Puggy-Wuggy's wounds. Marian's heart was a tender one, and she was inclined to believe that a man who was good to a dog was, of necessity, a good man.

The matter being thus settled to her temporary satisfaction, she was ready to go back to the subject of outbreaks and Indians. And just at that moment, he who was, to her mind, the greatest living authority upon such subjects, appeared coming toward the house. It was Haggarty.

He came upon the porch and saw Beveridge stretched out in the chair. Hag-

garty did not, as yet, look with favor upon Beveridge. The youth was still a tenderfoot, and it would take time and a lot of experience to make him anything else. Also he thought that the army young people should be good enough for Miss Marian. There were none of her own age in the post, but Haggarty chose to ignore that fact.

He answered Beveridge's good-humored greeting with extreme formality. "Good day, sor," he said. When Haggarty's manners were the most elaborate, his brogue was the most thick.

"Haggarty," began Marian, promptly, swinging herself back and forth with the point of her toe, "what's all this about an outbreak on the Aguas Calientes reservation? Is it so — that they have massacred a whole family?"

According to Haggarty, it was not so. "They ain't massacred nothing except some of their own ponies that they cooked and et, I guess. There was a cow-puncher scared out of his wits that wanted to get up a whole war. He rode in and reported a family was being scalped when he lit out. Come to boil it down, there was just one storekeeper shot in the arm by some hostiles on the run that was tryin' to pot him for the luck of it."

So far there had been twenty-five men from "D" Troop ordered out. Those were to leave in half an hour.

Then Haggarty, having given the information, asked for news of Puggy-Wuggy. As it had been his own dog who had done the damage, he felt, in a measure, to blame. Skeezicks himself was sitting out at the foot of the steps, the picture of dejection and

disgrace, watching his master beseechingly for the first signs of a willingness to forgive.

"That there Creighton could have stopped the fight before it was began," he told Marian, "only he thought he'd be funny and sick 'em on."

Now this was news to Marian. Creighton himself had not represented it to her in just that way. She took it, however, with reservations. Haggarty might be relied upon to tell the truth concerning Indians and scouts, but not always concerning a recruit.

Creighton had done the bandaging very kindly and skilfully, she gave Haggarty to understand. Haggarty sniffed, but made no further comment. He was beginning to believe that Miss Marian was acquiring a liking for tenderfeet. He took his departure in a moment.

"Queer lot—but nice sort of old duffer," said Beveridge, rising. He knew better now than to permit himself to laugh at Haggarty in Marian's presence. "I'm going down to see 'D' Troop off," he added. "Get your *sombrero* and come along."

Marian shook her head. She had seen bigger sights than a little handful of men starting off, and besides—she had other plans. She wanted to be left alone.

The cook had returned from her visit to the laundress row, the striker was piling more wood in the chest, the fire had been heaped with pine knots, and the house was no longer deserted and silent. Marian could not but glance at the place where she had seen Creighton kneeling above the drawer, too intent to notice her; but she drew a big chair before the fireplace and sat down to think.

It was too late in the afternoon for anything to be done now. She must wait to see Creighton until the next day. And she could only hope that between now and then her father would not go into the drawer where he kept his funds. At any rate, she would have to take that risk. He had been so nice about Puggy-Wuggy — Creighton had. He must be given his chance. Marian decided that this was her decision.

It was that which had always been Marian's trouble — had gotten her into difficulties before, though never such as were in front of her now. She was always a good deal too ready to rely upon her own judgment — to make up her mind for herself, regardless of the opinions of older and wiser minds. It was not exactly that she was either headstrong or spoiled — only that she carried independence a trifle too far.

As if Fate, too, intended that Creighton should have his chance, Captain Norris did not go into the particular drawer where his troop funds were kept, that night. But he was doing a good deal of work about the desk, and Marian's heart was in her mouth at every move he made.

Also, just before retreat, who should have come coolly ringing the front door-bell but Creighton himself? And he stood talking to the Captain for some little time. Marian, watching, had wondered if the money he had taken were in his pocket at that very minute.

When she went upstairs to bed — with Puggy-Wuggy, stiff and sore, sleeping uneasily in his basket near by — she lay for what seemed to her to be long hours, planning how she should manage to see Creighton alone the next day. It was by

no means so easy for an officer's daughter to bring about the chance of seeing a private whenever she wished. At last, however, she bethought herself of a scheme; then she fell asleep.

Well before reveille she was up and dressed in her riding-habit; and just as first call sounded she saw the striker passing beneath her window. She rapped with the tips of her fingers on the glass. Story looked up, and Marian raised the window quietly. She leaned out into the sharp morning air and told him to bring up her horse.

It was by no means unusual for Miss Marian to go riding before breakfast. Story went off in the direction of the stables, and came back directly, riding girl-fashion on Marian's side-saddle, with Natchez — lively in the cool of the daybreak — swinging along at his fastest trot.

Marian mounted and rode up to the hospital. The hospital steward and Marian had been good friends since the days when he had devised dyes for her Easter eggs, and the more recent days when he had made death easy for one or two of her disabled pets. She meant to ask him now for advice concerning the injuries of Puggy-Wuggy. But what she meant still more to do was to see Creighton before he should go back to duty and the barracks; which he would do after sick-call. And sick-call was not far off. There was need for haste. If Creighton were not in sight, she intended to ask for him — let the steward and all the others wonder as they might.

But it happened that Creighton was walking up and down upon the long, wide porch. It might have been, from her ap-

pearance as she went up to him, Marian herself upon whose conscience was the guilt. She was hardly less frightened now than she had been the day before; and her face was quite as white.

As for Creighton, he did not lose any of his fresh, boyish color, just at first. He raised his cap as the girl, lifting her long riding-skirt, came toward him.

Marian hesitated. She had planned it that she would lead up to the subject gradually. But she was far too nervous for diplomacy now — and sick-call might sound at any time. Then her chance would be gone.

She glanced at the windows of the wards, beyond which the iron bunks stood in rows. The sashes were down. There was no one to hear.

She rested a shaking hand upon the rail.

Then she came straight and abruptly to the point.

"I want you to give me back the money you took yesterday," she said.

It was Creighton who went pale now. But not even for the first instant did he lose his self-control. He looked puzzled, drawing his brows together. His eyes never dropped.

"The money, Miss Norris?" he asked, quite evenly. "I am afraid I don't understand."

Marian's color came rushing back in a flush of angry annoyance. It was too bad of him, when she was taking such great risks to give him his chance! He should have behaved more gratefully than this.

"I saw you," she said shortly; "I was standing in the sitting room part of the

time, and I saw you. So there isn't the least use in the world pretending you don't know what I mean."

But Creighton was gaining time. "Saw what?" he parried; "I'm sorry I must bother you to explain."

Marian's blue eyes flashed angrily, and she did explain. She was not long about it; but when she had finished, there could be no doubt that he was bound to understand whether he liked or not.

"I was afraid to speak to you then," she admitted openly now, "but I was going to call somebody just as soon as you left the house. Then" — she decided, on the moment, not to bring Beveridge into it — "then I made up my mind that I'd give you a chance. I haven't even told my father, and he hasn't been into his box. If you give me the money

now, I'll put it back in the box myself, and nobody will ever know."

She waited, but Creighton did not answer at once. "If you don't," she added decisively, "I'll go back and tell the whole thing — and then — " she left the consequences for him to fill out himself. "You'd better hurry, too," she added. "If sick-call goes and the doctor comes over, it will be too late."

Creighton looked nervously at the hallway and the open door. He moved a little farther away, and Marian followed him.

Then he spoke, and all the confidence was gone from his voice.

"I haven't got the money, Miss Norris," he said. And she believed from the very tone that it was true.

She stood looking at him, wide eyed.

It was for herself she was frightened now. It would be through herself, through her own interference and meddling, that her father would be short in the troop funds. The seriousness of the situation flashed upon her. She backed off toward the nearest pillar and leaned against it, still with her wide eyes watching Creighton's face.

Just at the moment the first notes of sick-call sounded from over in the quadrangle.

Marian turned her head and looked in the direction of the doctor's quarters. The doctor was already coming out of his back gate. There was no more time to be lost. She gathered her strength as best she could and stood erect. It would never do for the doctor to see her trembling and frightened, talking to the recruit.

Her voice was almost steady when she spoke again. "Then I must tell my father," she said with decision. "I must tell him at once."

Creighton took a step toward her. "Don't do that," he said. "You haven't given me my fair chance yet. Wait until I have my chance."

Marian demurred. "But —" she began.

Creighton saw the advantage. He cut in, following it up hurriedly. "Give me my chance," he reiterated, ringing the changes upon her own idea. "Wait until this afternoon. I go back to duty to-day," he was speaking with breathless haste. "I will be at the stables this afternoon. If you will go down to see your own horse, or something —" He stopped, studying her face with the keenest anxiety.

She was very dubious. Her father's

anger would be great enough if he should learn about the money. It would be simply dreadful if he should know of her going to hospitals and troop-stables to meet the recruit who had taken it. The best she could possibly hope for then would be to be sent East to boarding-school — the one thing she most dreaded in all the world.

She shook her head. "I can't do it," she told him.

Creighton leaned forward, clasping his hands. "My chance!" he urged her. "Give me my chance," he begged.

The steps of the doctor could be heard on the path.

"How much did you take?" said Marian.

He told her. Thirty dollars it had been. Thirty dollars! It was precisely

the amount in her savings bank at home. "You are certain?" she questioned.

He nodded emphatically. "Certain," he said.

The steps of the doctor were very near. And still, for another moment, Marian delayed. There was no more time to waste. Marian took the plunge.

"Very well," she began; "but only until this afternoon, remember."

The steward had stepped upon the porch. Marian went up to him and explained concerning Puggy-Wuggy's injuries. Was she too late to be attended to now?

The steward looked to where the doctor had stopped on the pathway to speak to another officer. There would be still, perhaps, a few minutes to spare. He turned back down the hall and led the way to the dispensary.

"Seems that's a savage big brute of yours," he said, laughing. The fame of the fight had gone abroad.

"He's a sorry small dog just at present," Marian told him, trying to laugh too. She looked over her shoulder to the corner of the porch where she and Creighton had been standing.

The porch was empty. Creighton had disappeared.

CHAPTER IV

"We used to think," said Marian, sitting on the edge of the feed-box, pulling Natchez' head down by the forelock and whispering confidentially into his pricking, black ear — "we used to think that it would be all sorts of fun and excitement to be in a plot, didn't we? But now that we're in one — in it with both feet and all four hoofs — it isn't half the lark that it's supposed to be. Is it, old fellow?"

Natchez shook his head, perhaps in negative, perhaps because she was tickling his ear.

"It's precious uncomfortable, we think, don't we?" she insisted, tugging at the forelock. But if Natchez was uncomfort-

able, he did not show any signs of it. The thing he was interested in was sugar, and he was nosing around the pocket from which she had just produced one lump. Another was forthcoming. He nuzzled it from her palm and scrunched it leisurely. Plots might be bothering human girls, but they left the consciences of well-mannered and gentle black horses entirely at rest. If his mistress would come down after stables — after he had been all nicely curried and groomed and watered and fed, and would bring him cut loaf-sugar by way of dessert, he had little else in the world to wish for — excepting more sugar, of course. And he was asking for that again. But this time his mistress was paying no heed. She pushed his soft nose away and got down from the feed-box so abruptly as to make

him throw back his head and strain at his halter-shank.

Then she walked out to the open space of the corral between the two rows of stalls, and stood there. Creighton, still in his white stable suit, was in the gateway looking around. He saw her now and came down to her.

For the moment the corral was empty. But the two men who were policing it would be going back and forth, and the farrier and a private were in the grain room near the gate.

Creighton knew these things, and the privacy was not so great as he would have liked. He suggested as much to Marian. But Marian was by no means minded to have any more appearance of secrecy than was absolutely necessary. As she had confided to Natchez, being in plots was not pleasant.

She was far from being as nervous as she had been that morning. She had herself and the whole situation much better in hand. So long as they were to stay in full sight, in the centre of the corral, it was probable that very little attention would be paid to them.

"We will stand *here*," she said to Creighton, decisively. And then she went to the matter without delay.

Had he brought the money? she wanted to know. He answered her as directly. He had not.

She stood looking up at him in blank dismay. But he hurried on to explain, flushing up to the line of his campaign hat and the roots of his curly light hair. His distress was so perfectly evident that Marian was sorry for him, in spite of the fear of those consequences which were begin-

ning to hang over her own head. And as the explanation went on, her sympathy grew.

Now Marian's city life had been limited; she had not had much of it, and she had had no experience with the stories of city beggars. So it never occurred to her to doubt the pitiful tale of hard luck and no work, of a mother and two little sisters in need of food, of enlistment that he might send them the greater part of his small pay, of his hopes of becoming in time, by virtue of hard work and good behavior, an officer.

She had stood listening, a good deal worked upon, but she interrupted here. And was it his idea of good behavior, she asked him, to be pilfering the funds of his own troop not a month after he had joined? The hurt tears sprang into his big blue eyes, and she was sorry at once.

"When I brought over your little dog," he said humbly, and yet reproachfully, "when I brought over your little dog, I had just come from the sutler's store — from the post-office, and there was a letter from my mother in my pocket. She told me that she was hungry and cold."

He felt in his pocket, drew forth a folded sheet, and held it out to her. "This is the letter," he told her. Would she like to see it?

The fact that there was no envelope to the letter might have struck a more experienced person as a little odd. But though Marian relied so much on her own experience, she did not notice it.

She shook her head. She was ready to believe him without reading the letter, she told him. It was hardly Creighton who was justifying himself to her, any longer;

it was rather she who was coming, somehow, to feel herself in the wrong and to justify herself to him.

She made haste to tell him what she had done. The thirty dollars he had taken had been replaced by the thirty dollars from her own savings bank. "Now, if father goes to counting over the money, there won't be any missing," she explained.

Creighton's face lighted with great relief. But Marian dashed his hopes, a little reluctantly. It would be only a temporary arrangement, she was obliged to explain. At the end of the month her father expected to add her thirty dollars to what she had already in the regular bank in the East. Then if it were not there to give him, he would have to know.

"You can have your chance until then," she said; "I would give it to you for

longer if I could, you know. But that is the best I can do."

Creighton stood for a little time, thinking hard, looking worried and perplexed. Then his mouth shut with determination, and he looked up. He had made his plans. And he told her what they were.

He had friends from whom he could borrow a little money in an emergency. And surely this was an emergency. He would write to them. He would send off the letter by the next morning's stage. "Before the end of the month I will pay you back, and you will never be sorry that you have given me my chance," he said.

Marian felt sure of that herself, and she told him so. Then she left him, and went back to Natchez' stall to feed him two more lumps of sugar, and to whisper more confidences into his protestingly twitching ear.

"And be sure," she counselled him, much more cheerfully than a little while past, "be sure that if you *do* get into plots you give everybody his chance, and come out of it all as well as your mistress is going to do." Then she rubbed his satin nose, at parting, and went out of the stall.

By the gate of the corral she came upon Haggarty. He looked at her with a disapproval he made no attempt to conceal. Haggarty believed that he had privileges, and that, as he had carried Miss Marian in his arms before she could walk, and had kept her out of, or rescued her from, all sorts of scrapes from that time on, he was perfectly justified in entire frankness now.

"Is the Captain down here with ye?" he wanted to know.

Marian tried to pass it off boldly that he was not; but Haggarty was not to be

thwarted like that. "Is there any officer with ye?"

Marian was obliged to admit that there was not. "I was feeding Natchez some sugar," she excused herself guiltily, beginning to feel again the disadvantage of being in plots.

"Then if ye want to feed yer horse sugar that bad," he advised, "you jest send word over to me, or you tell Story to look after his own business and go fetch him up to the line. It ain't no place for a big girl like you to be hanging around corrals. If you feel like feeding Natchez sugar after stables every day, you tip me the word. I'll ride him up to ye myself. But don't come playing around the corrals." Haggarty lapsed back to his way of speech of the days gone by, and of Miss Marian's short skirts and mud pies. "Not unless," he

added, "you got your papa or some other officer along."

He had his own ideas about the proprieties, had Haggarty. And Marian knew quite well, moreover, that they were right.

"Now you promise that," he said. Marian promised, and Haggarty's good humor was restored. "That's right," he commended, feeling his sense of proprietorship, which had been slipping away a good deal in the past few weeks, restored. Then he rewarded her for being so tractable.

"Seen the new puppies that Skeezicks is the proud father of?" he asked. Marian had not seen them. "Come along, then, and I'll show them to ye." He started to lead the way toward the quartermaster's corral.

Marian stood where she was and did not move. Haggarty turned about.

"Ain't ye comin'?" he wanted to know, surprised.

Marian dropped her eyes and pursed her lips. She was a pattern of youthful and feminine modesty, demure to the last degree. "I'm too big a girl to be hanging around corrals," she said.

Haggarty stood for a minute, undecided, taken aback. He was not altogether certain but that he ought to feel himself hurt. Then gradually a broad, good-tempered, Hibernian grin broke over all his face, seamed and reddened by years and many scouts.

"Who brought ye up, I'd like to know," he scoffed; "come along and look at them pups."

But Marian held her ground. She had not her father or any other officer along; "And I promised, you know," she reminded him.

"And sure," argued Haggarty, "who was it that was a father to ye many a time when your own was away earnin' his daily hardtack and chasin' the noble buck?" Marian turned and followed him.

The quartermaster's corral stood apart from the troop corrals and was much larger — a big square place enclosed by adobe walls. The wagons, carts, and Red Cross and other ambulances were kept there.

The Red Cross ambulance was pulled out from its shelter just now. It stood in the middle of the open space, and half a dozen or more children from the officers' line and the laundress row were playing in it, balancing upon the tongue and climbing in and out.

Anything, from a dump cart to a bag-

gage wagon was more or less desirable to play in, but the Red Cross ambulance, with its symbol painted large on the sides, its dark and mystery-fraught interior, its long seats, its nooks and receptacles, was better than all else. Marian could remember the time, not so far gone by, when she herself had stretched out upon the long leather cushions, imagining herself a wounded hero, with entire success. She smiled at the children as she followed Haggarty into the harness room, where the puppies were housed.

Louis Beveridge was there before them. He was sitting on an overturned pail — used for harness washing at other times — and holding, one in each hand, an all but infinitesimal dog of a hideousness quite unequalled even in Marian's experience — a wide one, since no dog of pedigree is

so dear to the true soldier's heart as a thoroughgoing cur.

Louis put down one of the puppies, and held the other out to exhibit it. "There are its father's spots," he pointed. The remnants of Skeezicks's remote coach-dog ancestry showed in some sprinkled patches on the faintly pink skin. "And there's an unknown progenitor's curling tail — must have been pug. And here's its mother's yaller bristles." The hind legs were a deep umber color. "Here's a tendency to greyhound in the muzzle, and here's the under jaw of a bull! It isn't every pup that can show so many characteristics at the tender age of half a dozen days. When his eyes are opened, to be consistent, one of them should show pink, and the other, say — brown and blue."

The puppy squealed feebly and wriggled

in the broad palm. The little mother looked up with apprehension from her place among the other five.

Beveridge bent down and completed the litter of six. "Going to drown a few of them, Haggarty?" he asked. But Haggarty repulsed the idea. Drown a perfectly good puppy! Not he. "They was every last one of them promised the day they was born," he informed him. "Puppies like that ain't so easy to get."

Louis was convinced of that. "It isn't often you can own so many sorts of dogs in one," he confessed. Then he took a bridle from the wall. "I came down to see about this bit of mine," he explained. "I'm just a civilian, you know — haven't any official standing except that of camp-follower — and my uncle's only a Doughboy, besides. So my horse can't go into

the cavalry stables. He has to be kept in the Q.M. corral — along with the wagons and the mules and a few cows."

He turned to Haggarty. "Now this bit of mine" — he held it out to him; "I think there's too much length of shank to it, and it's too narrow." He fell to discussing the matter with an amount of intelligence that sent him up in the old soldier's estimation at once.

Marian, as she bent over the box of puppies, glanced up sidewise, and then turned quickly back again to hide the smile that came as she saw Haggarty's expression of unwillingly growing respect.

He took the bridle from Beveridge. "You wait here," he commanded, "and I'll go try this on yer horse and see where it don't fit right. And then," he volunteered, with the greatest amiability,

"I'll go see the blacksmith about it myself — or I'll get ye another wan." He went out into the corral, leaving the door open behind him.

The children were still playing in the Red Cross ambulance. A team of four gray mules had just been unhitched from a wagon and left standing in their harnesses. They were near the ambulance, and two of the larger children were braving the chance of kicks and trying to hook the loose traces to the ambulance's singletree. Marian noticed them absent-mindedly.

"That very pretty little auburn-haired girl is Martha Lorrimer's sister," she said. "You've seen Martha, haven't you?"

"Yes," said Louis. "She's a stunner."

"See here," Marian changed the subject. "You'd better take care; Haggarty will be

thinking he owns *you* next — and it has some disadvantages, sometimes. He's a dear of course, but he can be rather a nuisance."

Louis smiled. And then the smile went suddenly away. His face grew serious. He crossed the little room to a big padlocked chest, and sat upon it.

"See here, yourself, Miss Marian," he began, "I've got something to talk to you about."

Marian's heart gave a jump. Being in plots, she had discovered within the last four-and-twenty hours, gave one's heart a tendency to jumps at the most trivial thing. She was even aware that she grew a little white — and still worse, that Louis, who was observing her narrowly, had seen that she did.

"I've got to warn you about something," he continued, with the utmost de-

liberation, impressing every word. "But you must promise me this, first — you must promise me not to repeat to any one a thing that I say."

He waited. Marian promised. He went on.

"You may remember that I said yesterday, when we were talking about burglars and that sort of thing, that I believed in giving every fellow his chance. Well, I do. That is the reason that I don't want you to repeat what I say." She nodded understandingly. "And I also believe in not meddling in other people's business," he kept on, "so I'm not going to inquire what it was you were talking about to that fellow who calls himself Creighton, when I passed by the hospital this morning, nor when I passed 'L' Troop corral gate just a little while ago."

She started to speak, but he put up a silencing hand. "Never mind," he advised, "I'd rather not know; I'll suppose it was about Puggy-Wuggy and his damages. But what I want to say to you, is this: It would be just as well for you to have as little to say to that fellow as you possibly can. It isn't the first time I've met him, by a good deal — and I know what I'm talking about. His name isn't Creighton and he's not — "

There was a rattle and clash of traces and wheels out in the corral, the shrill and frightened screams of children, and the shouts of men. Four big and plunging gray mules, dragging the Red Cross ambulance after them, were starting on a run for the open gates of the corral.

Haggarty and another man were after them, but the mules were making good

time, urged on by the screams and by the off wheeler, who was stinging still from the blow of a sharp-pointed stone that one of the boys had thrown in fun.

Louis Beveridge took in the situation in one look. The next moment he was trying to be the first to reach the gates and close them before the mules could get through. If they could run, so, too, could he. He cleared the ground in long springs, and won in the short, swift race.

One of the big and heavy gates he had pushed to, and he jumped for the other as the mules bore down, kicking as they ran. One of the leaders struck him with its head. He made a snatch at its check-strap — and missed.

On the instant the wheels of the ambulance crashed against the gate, breaking it, and throwing it wide; the mules were

tearing up in the direction of the post, and Beveridge was dragging after them, his head beating against the ground, nearer and nearer among the pounding hoofs, his feet caught in the dragging reins.

There was a momentary hesitation. The men had reached the gate themselves, and Marian stood with them, covering her face with her hands and cowering, but making no sound.

It was Haggarty who was the first to come to a decision. Louis Beveridge's horse, upon which he had been trying the bit, stood in the stall. It was barebacked, but the bridle was on. Haggarty ran back, flung himself upon it, and shot out through the gate, starting — not after the ambulance but well to one side, making a wide detour.

There were not many soldiers around that part of the outskirts of the garrison,

just then, and only two or three had caught sight of the ambulance bumping and whirling along after its four powerful grays, with the limp burden which had ceased to struggle or throw out its arms, dragging beside. Those two or three ran forward, but the mules swerved from right to left and kept on, the ambulance riding first on the wheels of one side, then on those of the other.

If the mules were to turn into the road that led to the quadrangle of the post, they would be stopped. If they should turn out behind the officers' quarters where there were rocks and gullies and after that a sheer hill to the bed of the creek — !

Haggarty, planning for just that, widened his circle and put his horse to a faster run, belly to the ground. He had gained on the ambulance. He was getting ahead

of it. He would be in front of it in a moment more.

The mules jerked sharp about and started for the quadrangle. But the ambulance had ridden on a single wheel once too often. It balanced so for an instant, now — then it went banging over on its side.

Even the four big baggage wagon mules could not drag it far that way. They plunged and kicked and scrambled on for a few yards, pulling the long, clumsy thing after them. Then they came to a stop in a struggling, tangled heap.

Haggarty was on the ground beside Louis Beveridge and had whipped out a penknife and cut loose his foot. But the time was past when Louis could rise by himself.

Haggarty turned him over and looked in his face. It was torn and bleeding and thick with sand and dust. There was a

hole in the side of his head, and his eyes were closed. Haggarty put down his ear and listened. There was breath yet, to be sure, and the heart was beating, but only feebly.

Others were taking the children from the overturned ambulance, and they were none the worse. But the chance for Louis Beveridge was bad. Haggarty knew that it was. He tried to lift him, but Beveridge's weight was greater than his own. It took three of the men to carry him to his uncle's quarters and put him upon the bed. Then, the doctor being already on hand, Haggarty went off to catch the horse.

Half an hour later he met Marian upon the board walk.

Had he heard how Louis Beveridge was? she asked. Haggarty had just seen Major

Beveridge's striker, and Louis was unconscious still.

"There's a hole in the side of his head, where he got kicked. It's the size of yer fist," said the old soldier, who could improve a story like any other Irishman. "And the doctor says it's a toss-up if he ever comes to again, with odds on the other side."

Marian thought of the half-told warning and of the unfinished words.

Were they to prove to be the last that poor Louis would ever speak?

CHAPTER V

UNDER ordinary circumstances the snow which was falling would have seemed to Marian beautiful and delightful to the last degree. She would have been out in it, turning up a cheerful face to feel the soft, cold flakes. As it was she was staying indoors and standing by the window of the sitting room, looking out. And her face was not cheerful. She began to think that she was growing too old to enjoy even things which should be so enjoyable as the season's first snow — which, at sixteen years of age, was a serious frame of mind.

She watched the children who were scampering up and down the line and across the parade ground, screaming and

laughing and calling out. She heaved a heavy sigh, so heavy that Puggy-Wuggy, asleep before the fire and perfectly contented with his own lot, — now that his hurts were well, — was disturbed and awakened. He got up, looked his reproach with round pop eyes and limply uncurled tail; and finding no notice taken of him, turned himself around exactly five times, lay down, and went to sleep again.

Some of the children who were playing out there were the very ones who had been in the Red Cross wagon three weeks before, and they were none the less happy that Louis Beveridge, because of them, had been for four days between life and death, and was far from being altogether out of danger even now.

Marian had thought a good deal about Louis's last words — the advice and that

unfinished sentence which might have explained so much, which might have let her know for a certainty how she should act.

As it was, she was in the most perplexing doubt. She could imagine all manner of things concerning the recruit whom he had warned her against. He might be anything — from just a somewhat dishonest person up to a burglar, or even a murderer. Whatever he might be, it is certain that the thought of having yet to deal with him was not calculated to produce in her a very pleasant frame of mind.

She was miserable and uneasy enough about that, and she was lonesome without Louis Beveridge as well. She wished there were some girls in the post. In every way her world was going all wrong.

So deep into the darkness of her thoughts she had gone that she did not realize that

the door-bell had rung, that some one had come into the hallway, hung up his cap and cape and the sabre of the officer of the day, and was standing before the fire looking at her with a smile of much amusement.

But, directly, she felt the look and turned her head. It was her father's second lieutenant, a youngster fresh from West Point. Marian was disposed to think of him as a good deal of a "kid," and to treat his opinion of things in general with far less deference than she did those of Beveridge, though the latter's years were fewer by three or four.

The Lieutenant was in and out of the house at all hours and seasons, so she did not greet him with any especial formality. She only smiled and left the window to go over to the hearth-rug and talk to him.

"Whyfore so mournful?" he tried to tease. "Wishing for Louis Beveridge?"

But Marian was not to be teased. She was perfectly willing to have it known that she was "wishing for Louis Beveridge." "Yes," she admitted frankly, "I am. I miss him most awfully."

The Lieutenant nodded his head sympathetically.

Did he know how Louis was, to-day? Marian asked. "Just met the medico coming from there," he said. "The report isn't quite so favorable. He isn't out of his head any more, though — hasn't been for several days. When he was, seems he talked about all kinds of concerns — of you and of scallywags in general, and of some one scallywag in particular, Lemering or Levering, or some such name as that. He kept mixing you

and the scallywag up all the time. He also raved about corrals and puppy-dogs and Haggarty. And it appears he thought that Martha Lorrimer's little sister was being kicked to death by a gray mule. He had a bad time of it, poor chap. And the doctor isn't sure he won't have it again — what's more. Funny his mixing up you and Lemering — or Levering — so persistently."

The Lieutenant's back was turned to the fire, his hands were clasped behind him, and he was gazing straight before him at a picture on the opposite wall. As a result, he did not happen to see the expression of Marian's face. Which was probably just as well for Marian, as it might have led to inquiries.

While she was trying to think of something to answer, Captain Norris came up on the porch and into the house.

Marian went back to the window, drew a chair to it, and took up a book. She began to read. But her mind was not on the reading, and presently she caught a bit of what her father and the Lieutenant were talking about. They were in earnest colloquy. But there was no attempt at secrecy about it, and Marian felt justified in listening.

"As far as I can learn," Captain Norris was saying, "the thing began a couple of weeks ago — or rather more. Loomis thought he missed something—some money — out of his clothes. It was only a dollar or two, however, and he hadn't been quite sure how much he'd left in the pockets. So he didn't speak of it to any one."

"I've noticed that before," the Lieutenant put in, a little keen to show his familiarity with privates and their ways. "They'd

rather lose a few dollars in quiet than run the risk of getting the other men down on them for grumbling."

Captain Norris agreed. "And then, too, it's a delicate matter," he said. "If Loomis had spoken about it right away, ten to one his bunkies on either side would have been on their ears, imagining he was suspecting them."

"Who are they?" the Lieutenant wanted to know. Captain Norris told him. One was a man whom Marian did not know. The other was Haggarty.

"As for Haggarty," said the Lieutenant, confidently, "he's in his fifth enlistment, isn't he? And his record's good. He'd hardly have begun pilfering at his advanced and reverend age. The other fellow is comparatively new, though. But he's a stolid, lumpish kind of a Dutchman,

it always struck me. I should say he was too heavy-footed and heavy-fingered to make much of a success of stealing anything."

Captain Norris nodded. "It's not *he*," he said decidedly.

The Lieutenant took him up. "You don't mean to imply that it might, by any chance, be Haggarty?" He went unanswered.

"The next thing that was missed," continued the Captain, as though he had not heard, "the next thing that was missed was an old fatigue suit. That was Kreutzer's. Then a campaign cap went; then some other small things. I've got the list," — he tapped a pocket, — "then some more money — as much as eighteen or twenty dollars from different men. After that, socks began to disappear, then under-

wear. But the final straw was when one of the last batch of recruits — Ewing his name is — found his watch gone out of his kit. Then there was fun to pay. Seems it was a watch that had belonged to somebody or other — and it broke him all up."

The Lieutenant asked a question. "It's the recruits, isn't it, who have fared the worst in the business, anyway?"

It appeared that such was the case. "There's that young fellow named Creighton," — Marian had long since laid down the book; now she leaned forward eagerly, — "the one," said Captain Norris, "who has ideas about getting a commission — and who may stand a very fair chance of it, if he'll stop making love to Martha Lorrimer, as the first sergeant tells me he seems to be doing."

"Martha Lorrimer?" said the Lieutenant. "She's the jolly handsome girl down in suds-row, the one with the gray eyes and auburn hair; the Sergeant-major's daughter?"

It was plain from the way he spoke that the Lieutenant had an eye for beauty, himself. "Don't know that I blame him so much," he finished.

The Captain smiled and shook his head. "No, to be sure," he admitted, "neither do I. But you pay your money and you take your choice. He'll have to choose. If he takes the Sergeant-major's daughter, of course he can't take his commission — that's one thing very sure." The Lieutenant acquiesced.

"And," added the Captain, more severely, "if he makes love to her and then jilts her, he won't get it either. Martha's a

nice girl, and I can't have anybody breaking her heart. As for Creighton," he concluded, "some way I don't like the fellow. I don't know why. He's well educated, and he's well set up and he behaves himself; but it always seems to me that underneath it all his manner is cheeky and flip, and a little cringing, too. It may be just imagination."

"I don't know why, either," said the Lieutenant, "but he affects me that way, too. I wouldn't trust him far."

A thought occurred to Marian. Was it possible that these two men were right in their opinion? Was it possible that their judgment was correct when her own, upon which she was so very fond of relying, was wrong?

Captain Norris was speaking again. "But to go back to the thefts: as I was

saying, it seems to be the recruits who got the worst of it all around; and Creighton says that ten dollars was taken out of his trousers pockets. To be sure, he hadn't any business leaving as much as that around."

"To be sure," assented the Lieutenant. "But supposing we get down to the bottom of this. Whom do you suspect?"

The Captain looked very much as if he did not wish to answer. His eyes shifted as if the guilt had been his own, and he bit at his under lip. "Well, you know," he gained time, "you can't settle a matter like this out of hand. There's got to be a regular investigation, and some detective work, and all that kind of thing."

"Yes," said the Lieutenant, sticking to it persistently. "But whom do you *suspect?*"

"Well," began the Captain again, about as thoroughly unhappy and uncomfortable as a man could be, "I feel more than a little ashamed of myself, to even let it enter my head, — much less to say it, — but I'll be hanged if it doesn't look as if it were Haggarty."

He stopped. Nobody spoke. "Every suspicion," he went on, "seems to point that way. Mind you, there's no *proof* as yet. And I haven't breathed it to any of the men. But half a dozen little things look mighty curious, piecing the testimony together. Then, you see, Haggarty has been spending more money than usual of late. I don't know what his fortune is, to be sure. He may have saved up a lot. He never seems to spend anything except for Christmas and birthday and Easter and Thanksgiving and New Year and Fourth of July and Washing-

ton's birthday and Lincoln's birthday and Decoration Day and in-between-day presents for Marian,"—he nodded toward his daughter, —"and for candy and chewing-gum for all the post kids, regardless of rank and station. But he used to send nearly all his pay back to his father and mother, and so, at that time he couldn't have saved. I don't know whether he's been doing it recently, but I think he has, because the old people are still alive. He was talking to me about them just the other day."

"I went to see the old fogies, once, when I was in New York," Captain Norris went on. "Haggarty asked me to. They were a good old couple. You could have cut their brogue with an axe. They evidently didn't distinguish any differences in little matters of rank." The recollection was bringing a smile to his greatly distressed face.

"They seemed to think that one man, in the army, was the same as the next. So as their son was a soldier, and I was a soldier, too, they wanted to do the tidy thing by me. They invited me to dinner and had some of their friends from the neighboring tenements, to meet me. And by Jove," admitted Captain Norris, "I *went*. And I had a jolly good time, too. They asked what my pay was, and I told them. Then they wanted to know if Haggarty got as much as all that. I had to confess that he didn't — not quite. But I didn't tell them just what he did get. I rather suspect he lets them think he's got money to burn."

Then his face fell again.

"But you know," he said, "that poor old duffer just about brought Marian up. He was our striker for years. He was in my troop when I was a lieutenant; then when I

got my captaincy and another troop, he transferred into that. He thinks still that his claims on Marian are equal to if not superior to mine. He took her out in his arms the first time she ever saw the blazing blue Arizona sky, and he taught her to walk and he taught her to ride, and he taught her to shoot. He's trained every horse and puppy she's ever had. He's saved her life a couple of times." There was no doubt about it that there was a choke in his voice, which the Captain turned into a savage cough. And the tears were swelling in Marian's eyes.

"Why, you know," he went on, "Haggarty's been an institution in the household — of hardly secondary importance to myself. In fact, there have been times when Mrs. Norris and I have had to take a back seat. So you can see how I naturally feel about this. I'd almost rather have taken the

trash myself than to have had him do it. And I'd fifty times rather make up for it to the men than have to have him accused. But that can't be done, of course. It's got to be settled now that it's gone so far."

But surely, the Lieutenant suggested, it was not merely on the strength of Haggarty's seeming to have a little more money than usual that Captain Norris was suspecting him. Unfortunately, the Captain told him, it was not. There were many other little straws pointing the way that the wind might be guessed to blow. He went over them to the younger officer.

"It looks bad," admitted the latter, "it certainly does. And there's no one else you can in any way suspect?" The Captain regretted sincerely that there was not. "Are you going to speak to him in private,

before the matter goes farther?" the Lieutenant asked.

"How can I?" Captain Norris questioned back. "With only some circumstantial evidence behind me, I don't see how I'd have the face. I'd feel so mean if I happened, by any chance, to be wrong. Still," he considered it, "I haven't made up my mind. I'll think it over."

The Lieutenant turned to Marian. "This young lady ought to be a very much interested party, I should think," he said. "Perhaps she has something to suggest?"

Marian waited for her father's permission to speak. She had been trained as to meddling with official affairs, and a recent meddling with a semi-official one was making her more cautious still.

"Well," consented her father, "what would you have to say?"

It was Marian's way to decide in a good deal of a hurry, to make up her mind with promptness. Sometimes it had been fortunate. Sometimes it had not. Her mind was already made up about this. She *had* her suggestion, and she made it at once. It was to the effect that she should see Haggarty herself.

"I could lead up to it, you know," she urged. "Girls can do those things a great deal better than men, very often." She was so deeply in earnest that the two men kept back their smiles. "I talk to him so much, and about so many things, it would come more naturally from me than from you, don't you think?"

"Perhaps," said Captain Norris, doubtfully. It was evidently a business he did not relish, any way it should be done.

"Of course," Marian assured him, "I

won't tell him that you suspect him, point blank. I'll just talk about it sort of generally and tell him there is going to be an investigation, and that the man who took the things ought to see you about it and confess and give them back — because you'd make it easy for him. Something like that," she finished. "But, of course, I'd have to think what to say as I went along." On the whole, it did not strike Captain Norris as entirely a bad scheme.

"I'll send Story over for him," Marian volunteered. "I'll pretend — let's see — " She sat thinking for a moment, her forehead in a frown. Then she looked up. "Oh! yes. I'll pretend I want some new runners put on that sled he made for me last year. They *are* rusty. And there's nobody can do it as well as he."

"There have always," remarked the Cap-

tain, dryly, "been some forty-'leven things that nobody could do quite so well as Haggarty. All right — go ahead and try. But don't," he warned, "don't hurt his very susceptible feelings."

Marian went out to find Story and send him over to the barracks; and when he was gone, she stood by the kitchen stove, a more complete picture of dejection, if that were possible, than she had been beside the sitting-room window, a while before. If there had been anything needed to complete her unhappiness, it was surely this — that Haggarty, the one and only Haggarty, should have fallen from grace.

Story was gone so long a time that she shrewdly suspected him of stopping to have some talks over the new excitement with the men at the troop quarters.

And in the end he came back alone.

Haggarty was not around. The last that had been seen of him he had been talking to Lowinsky the vegetable man; and now he was over at the blacksmith's shop, or the farrier's. But Story had left word for him, when he should return.

Evidently he had returned within a few minutes after, for he came presently.

"Did ye send for me?" he inquired, standing in the kitchen doorway, and refusing to step inside because of the snow on his boots. "It's pretty busy I am." Which was merely by way of a display of his importance. He was pleased to be wanted for something that Story was evidently not considered capable of doing, and it showed in every wrinkle of his face.

Marian wrapped a shawl about her head and shoulders, and led the way out to the

wood-house, where the sled had been stored for the past ten months. She showed the condition of the runners to Haggarty. He examined them with elaborate care. It might have been, at the very least, a compound fracture of a limb that required setting.

Then he determined upon what would be necessary. There was new band steel to be got, and a certain kind of screws; and the band steel must be pierced at such and such intervals. He would take it over to the blacksmith's and to the carpenter's, but he would have it in shape for her to coast with the next day, if she wanted it. In the meantime he was willing enough to sit down upon the wood-pile and talk.

"What you want to talk about?" he objected, settling himself comfortably upon

a large mesquite knot the while, and beaming from one large ear to the other. "I got something else to do besides this. You always seem to think I just enlisted for nothing else but to play with you. What is it you want to talk about? Be lively."

"I know you're awfully busy," she humored him. "But — "

"That's right, I am," interrupted Haggarty. "I go on guard to-morrow, and I've got my kit to shine up."

"But," went on Marian, "I want to hear about the — the — taking things that's been going on over at the troop." This was making a bold plunge decidedly. She felt herself hot and red into her very hair; and she felt like a traitress besides.

"Well — " said Haggarty. He stopped, cocking his head to one side, sharply.

"What's that?" he demanded, jumping to his feet.

It was three rifle-shots. Haggarty and Marian started out of the shed. The quick note of a bugle pealed out on the winter air; then the hurrying alarm of fire-call.

Some one shouted to some one else. And the bugle was shrilling above it all. Marian and Haggarty were out of the yard and upon the front roadway.

"Where's it at?" called Haggarty, as he ran.

Story answered him. "It's Major Beveridge's house — where the young man is hurt." He, too, was on the run. Marian looked. The flames were licking out of the roof.

CHAPTER VI

The fire spread fast along the roof of Major Beveridge's quarters. It had begun there, catching from the sparks out of a low and defective chimney. The shingles, dry after months of drought, and not yet wet thoroughly by the light snowfall, burned well, and the flames ate downward into the house itself.

Marian stood with the other women of the post, as near as they were allowed. The shawl she had worn out to the wood-shed was still wrapped over her head, making her look very much like one of the slender young Mexican women who came about the post occasionally, selling laces and drawn-work.

There was nothing for the women to do. Almost the first to arrive on the scene had been four men of the hospital corps, bringing a stretcher, and on the run. They went inside, and a few minutes later came out carrying Louis Beveridge, covered from head to foot, so that only a still, vague form beneath the blankets was to be seen.

They went slowly now, in the trained, stretcher-drill step, smoother than a hammock's swing. The post surgeon followed.

Some of the women, looking, shuddered audibly. It was very like death, the stillness and the white-shrouded shape.

"If only it isn't an omen," suggested one of them, "the moving is sure to be very bad for him." She was a person with a gift for seeing the dark side of everything.

Marian set her teeth angrily. Where

was the use of gloating over mournful and unpleasant possibilities, and trying to make people uncomfortable? Louis was getting better, and he had the constitution of an athlete and of a young savage — both in one — to back him up. The doctor had said so.

Marian reminded herself of this. But she looked after the stretcher as it was borne away, and the doleful prognostication was not without effect. The form beneath the blankets really was so very still.

"Why — they're taking him —," Marian exclaimed, laying her hand on her mother's arm, "they're taking him to our house. It must have been father who told them to."

Mrs. Beveridge was hurrying down the walk after him. Mrs. Norris, gathering up her skirts, ran to join the Major's wife.

In a few moments more Mrs. Beveridge turned back to help in the saving of her household goods, and Mrs. Norris went on to her own house alone.

"We've an extra bedroom, you know," explained Marian. "I suppose they are going to put him in there." For the first time Marian was not sorry that there was no "sister about her own age" to have the extra bedroom. Ordinarily it was the wish of her life.

The soldiers were fighting the fire with water-buckets and two or three hand-grenades, as best they could, but the fire was large, and the buckets were small, and presently the most of their attention was turned to saving the furniture.

They came out with a piano, with beds, with tables, with curtains jerked down from their poles, and hopelessly torn, with china

and ornaments. A single man would labor under a heavy load — two would carry out a small wicker chair. The big Dutchman of "L" Troop, concerning whom Captain Norris had spoken to the Lieutenant a while before, bore forth, with infinite care, two plates of caramels, one in either hand. He took them halfway across the parade ground and set them on the top of the piano with a triumphant air. Then he hurried back again.

The snow was falling all the while. One of the officer's wives suggested that it would be well to find blankets and rubber *ponchos* and cover up some of the furniture. They set to work upon it at once. Marian helped, glad enough of something to do. Standing by and watching with folded hands was not to her taste in anything.

Puggy-Wuggy, who had followed her and

who had been reproved for aiding the excitement and expressing his natural feelings by means of agitated barks, ran back and forth at her heels. He looked up now and then, and wagged his tail, expectant of praise. Then he grew disgusted with the lack of that attention which he felt he merited, and went off in search of occupation on his own account. He found it. And Skeezicks, who had been hanging around on the outskirts of things, came to his aid.

What Puggy-Wuggy had discovered was a doll belonging to Mrs. Beveridge's little girl. It was lying in a heap of curtains. Puggy-Wuggy pulled it out by its long kid leg. It was a large doll, rather too large for a small pug to manage. At least so Skeezicks decided. In view of the very attractive circumstances he was ready to forget old animosities. He took the arm

of the doll upon the opposite side. But here there arose a difference of opinion as to which way to go to take the doll to a safer place. Skeezicks, being a troop dog, was for the barracks. Puggy-Wuggy, being an officer's dog, was for the line.

By the time that Marian, summoned by the wailing of the youngest Beveridge, arrived to interfere, the doll had ceased to be a thing that was worth disputing over or the shedding of tears.

The fire was put out at last, but not until the quarters were badly damaged, and the upper story open to a thick, gray sky and the now whirling snow. The things that had been rescued were put away in neighboring houses and porches, and in the quartermaster's storerooms; and the five members of the Beveridge family were homeless and roofless for the nonce.

Haggarty passed Marian on his way back to the troop.

"Guess you'd better get Story to make out the best way he knows how with that sled," he advised. "I can't see to it now. I've got to get myself purtty for to-morrow — and it takes time and work."

Marian knew that her chance of diplomacy was gone, at least for the present. She went back to her house, walking slowly. Her eyes were on the ground and she started when some one took her by both shoulders. It was Major Beveridge.

"I say," he asked excitedly, "you didn't happen to see a leather pocket-book, — red leather with a silver clasp — anywhere around the parade ground, did you?" Marian had not. "All right," he said, setting her to one side of the walk and shooting past.

"What was in it?" she called after him.

"Fifty dollars," he shouted back. "It was in my desk, and it's disappeared."

Surely it was an epidemic of robbery. Never in all her experience had there been such occurrences as these. It had always been possible in the past to leave doors and windows unlocked and to lie down and rise up again in peace and security. And one might have put a handful of gold in the middle of the parade and have left it there for weeks. It would never have been so much as touched.

She spoke of it to her father, later in the evening when they were all in the sitting room, talking and moving quietly on account of the invalid in the extra bedroom upstairs.

"Oh! and, by the way," said the Captain, abruptly, "that reminds me. How

much have you got in that savings bank of yours?"

Now that was the last thing in the world of which Marian would have wished to remind him. She saw her mistake, and she grew cold to the finger-tips. It seemed to her as if her voice would not come from her throat.

"I've saved about thirty dollars," she avoided a direct answer. He did not notice that.

"Well," he said, "you'd better give it to me to-morrow, and I'll send it on to deposit in your bank."

"It's locked up safely enough," she demurred weakly. Captain Norris dismissed it. There was no knowing whether anything was safely locked up, these days, it appeared. Marian subsided dutifully. The blow was about to fall. The Eastern

boarding-school loomed very near, and to-morrow was a time to dread.

Yet the morrow, when it came, passed without further reference to the little iron savings bank.

There was to be a "hop" that night. It was to be in honor of the paymaster and his wife, who were passing through. Now Marian did not go to the more formal hops, as a rule. And this was a formal one. But she had begged so hard that her father and mother had consented to let her dance for a couple of hours.

"But at ten o'clock," they told her firmly, "you must come home — and you must promise not to ask to stay after that." It was a small part of a loaf, but it was much better than no bread. And, besides, it fitted in with other plans remarkably well.

Creighton had sent her a note by Martha Lorrimer's little sister, saying that the money for which he had written had come, and that he would pay it to her whenever she liked.

Marian had given the matter consideration. She could think of no way to manage seeing Creighton any time during the little daylight that remained. Her mother had given her various things to attend to in the house — among others the making of certain custards which the doctor had ordered for Louis Beveridge. As for the evening — if she were to stay at home, her father would also be at home. Captain Norris did not dance. He would also be awake, because he was officer of the day and would be sitting up until after midnight to visit the guard.

It occurred to Marian that Creighton

might as well have sent the money by the little Lorrimer girl, while he was about it; but since he had not, perhaps there was some reason for it, some reason why he preferred to give it into her own hand.

She decided, therefore, that she would leave the hop-room at ten o'clock, as she had promised to do, would steal away inconspicuously without letting any one offer to take her home, would meet Creighton out behind the quartermaster's storehouse, get the money from him, go home, deposit it in her bank, and retire to bed somewhat easier in her mind than she had been in many a long day — for all that troubles still hung over Haggarty's poor old red-gray head.

But she would set that right next, if she could. And she was beginning to believe that perhaps she could — to have

rather a fair opinion of her powers as a straightener-out of tangled affairs.

So it was, therefore, — her father having failed to ask for her savings bank, and the prospect of a hop ahead, — she dressed with pleasant anticipations and a very light heart, and went off with her mother and the Beveridges.

Louis had sent her word from his bedroom that he only wished himself well enough to take her to the hop and to help her dance. It was almost the first long sentence he had spoken, and Marian was pleased. She was sure, besides, that now his recovery was only a matter of a very short time. The moving had not hurt him at all.

Moreover, the hop went decidedly well. The paymaster's wife was heard to ask who she might be, " that pretty young girl

with the big blue eyes and the wonderful fair hair." And the Second Lieutenant of "L" Troop was so nice to her that Marian began to forgive him for being such an "awful kid," — a description she had adopted from Haggarty.

All the officers danced with her. Marian said nothing to any of them about having to leave at ten o'clock. An escort would have — to say the least — interfered seriously with her plans. And there was not the slightest reason why she should not go back home across the parade ground alone. She had done so at even a later hour plenty of times before. But she watched the clock closely, the while she glided to the music of half the regimental band. She was having a glorious time.

Then when it was two minutes of ten, and — luckily for her — between dances,

she went to the dressing room, put on her overshoes, her long dark cloak with its hood over her head; and taking a last look at the dancers, swirling about again in the big room all bright with the glow from the reflectors of many kerosene barrack lamps, she crept out by the back door of the post hall.

There was no longer a storm, but the ground was thickly white, and the sky was thickly gray with clouds. The night was dark, and yet the whiteness of the snow made it possible to see fairly well.

The snow struck cold through her overshoes and thin slippers. The wind struck cold into the hood of her cloak. And within she was cold too — with fear.

What of Louis's warning against the fellow who "calls himself Creighton"? It said itself over and over to her; but

she went on nevertheless. What if the worst she had fancied and conjured up were true, after all? What if "the fellow who calls himself Creighton" were really a desperate burglar escaped from justice — or a murderer? No one knew that she had gone. No one would miss her for long hours, perhaps. She saw herself lying stiff and still in the snow. She saw herself — a shrouded figure such as Louis's had been — lying on a stretcher carried slowly between four men. And it was she who shuddered audibly, this time. But she kept on.

The place at which she had told Creighton to meet her was not far from the hop-room. It was in a corner made by an angle in the wall of the quartermaster's storerooms and it was within a few yards of the quadrangle and the board

walk itself. Surely there could be no danger so near to home.

She plucked up her courage, but as she came into the angle of the building, she started, nevertheless, though all she saw was what she had expected to see — the vague and dark figure of a man. She went nearer. He did not move. She spoke to him. He answered. It was Creighton. Without a word he held out the money to her. She took it in both hands.

"Will you count it, please?" he said, whispering. "There are six five-dollar pieces. You will not need to see." She felt them over, counting. There were six. She wrapped them in her handkerchief and slipped it into an inner pocket of her cloak.

Creighton spoke to her again, still whispering. He thanked her for what she

had done. She had given him his chance, he said. He would take it. He would be grateful to the end of his days. Then he went back in the direction of the "L" Troop barracks, and Marian waited a moment before starting home. She was a little surprised now, and dazed to find the thing all safely over and herself alive.

But just as she emerged from the thick shadow of the angle she saw a group of several officers come out from the hop-room and, taking up their place on a corner of the board walk, light their cigarettes and fall to smoking and talking. They were directly in the path she must take to get home, and if she were to pass them, they might recognize her. All of them knew her cloak quite as well as they did herself.

There was no telling how long they

might stand there — longer, certainly, than *she* would care to stand where she was. The cold was beginning to penetrate. So she decided to make a detour. At the present she was feeling decidedly brave. She was not in the least afraid to go back of the storerooms and back of the quarters on that side of the square, then come into the quadrangle again at the northwest entrance, instead of at the northeast one where she was now.

She started cautiously off, keeping close to the wall, that the officers might not see her dark form against the snow.

Two hours later Haggarty, marching up and down behind the north end of the quadrangle, doing his monotonous guard duty, stopped in his even walk and listened. It seemed to him that he heard a faint and muffled sound, rather like the

weak sobbing of a child, or the whining of some hurt animal.

He traced it up, halting every few steps to listen again. It brought him to the edge of a deep hole in the ground, a post hole that had been dug only the day before for the placing of a telegraph pole. He stooped over and looked down. There was some one in it — some one who was moving very feebly.

"Who's down there?" he inquired, having his carbine ready.

He caught a stifled murmuring of his own name. "Is that you, Haggarty? It's Miss Marian. I'm dying, I think."

Haggarty was a sentinel, but his carbine went down in the snow.

"No you ain't neither," he encouraged, on general principles. "Give me yer hands," he said.

Another man might have stopped to find out how she had gotten in there. But not Haggarty.

Marian moved again. "I can't," she moaned; "they're frozen or something."

It was not only the carbine now that was down in the snow. Haggarty was also. He lay prone, his toes dug into the earth to brace himself. He ran his hands under her shoulders and raised her slowly, lifting her out at last. He set her on her feet, but she could not stand. So he supported her with one arm, even while he bent over and picked up his carbine.

"How did you get into there?" he asked now. He showed no sign of especial surprise. It might have been a nightly occurrence to find the daughters of officers half frozen in post holes behind the quarters. But Marian knew Haggarty of old.

And she knew that that very fact was ominous. She would have been glad to have had him rage and storm.

"You don't hev to tell me if you don't feel like it," he added.

"I'll tell you, Haggarty," she all but wailed. "Really, I will. But not now. Take me home now. And don't say anything to *any* one. Just take me home."

"I'm sentry," Haggarty told her shortly; "I can't leave my post."

"But I can't walk alone yet," she had broken down and was sobbing. "And oh! I *don't* want any one else to know."

"Come on," said Haggarty, without another word. He knew well enough that it was past midnight, and that Captain Norris would soon be making his rounds to visit the guard — if indeed, he were not doing so already.

"'I'M SENTRY, . . . I CAN'T LEAVE MY POST.'"

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And he also knew what it would mean for him to be found absent from his post. In war time it would have meant death. It would not mean quite that now — only disgrace. But Haggarty was a soldier of the right school. He would have preferred death to disgrace. In fact, he settled it in his own mind now, as he trudged through the snow carrying Miss Marian and his carbine; if he were disgraced, he would put an end to a life that would be unendurable. But at present he must save Miss Marian.

"Can you manage it so that father won't know — so he won't hear me come in?" asked Marian.

"I'll do me best," replied Haggarty.

As they neared the house he stopped and whispered in her ear. "I'll set ye down at the front door. You'd best go

upstairs alone — on your hands and knees, if ye can't make it any other way. Maybe you can go so quiet that there won't nobody hear ye. If they do, you could say you just came home from the hop, but you fell down in the snow. Tell them you strained your knee and you couldn't get up for a long time. That'll account too for what makes you so stiff."

"But it wouldn't be true," objected Marian. She did not like fibs.

"Then tell them the truth," said Haggarty; "I don't know what it is."

They were on the front porch. There was a light in the sitting room, and the curtains were up. Captain Norris was not in there.

"Making the rounds," thought Haggarty, knowing his own case was bad. "But it's good for Miss Marian," he told

himself, and what did an old soldier more or less matter, after all?

"Your father ain't there, I guess," he reassured her. "Sneak upstairs quiet-like, and get yourself into bed and warm up. Warm up the quickest way you know how. And tell any old story you feel like — the truth or anything. I'll hold my tongue and never let on."

Marian was still too dazed to be more than merely rather grateful, and very glad that her father was not at home. She could not, just then, take in the possible consequences of things for Haggarty. She did not realize that this wind which was blowing favorably for her might blow very unfavorably for him.

He opened the door for her. She passed warily in, and he closed it without a sound. She climbed the stairs on tiptoe, slowly,

painfully. There was no feeling in her arms and legs. But there was too much in her throat and sides. And the blood made a roaring noise in her head.

She locked herself into her room, and cowered close to the little iron stove, where a fire still burned. There was to be a supper after the hop. It would be hours yet before her mother would be home.

Haggarty went back to his beat at his fastest run. But he came too late. Captain Norris was before him, and so, too, was disgrace.

CHAPTER VII

THERE was nobody in the Norris family who was happy in the least. Marian was ill, burning and shivering by turns, and with a throat so swollen and sore that she could hardly speak, and could not well have explained how she had come by it, even if she had been asked. But, what puzzled her more than a little, she was not asked.

The reason, could she but have known it, was simple enough, however.

Her mother had not seen her in the hop-room after the hour at which it had been agreed she should leave; and she had, very naturally, supposed, therefore, that Marian had gone straight home.

As for Captain Norris, he had slept

soundly until the alarm clock, placed close beside his chair, had gone off at ten minutes past twelve o'clock. Then he had buckled on his sabre and gone forth to visit the guard, secure in the belief that his daughter — who was usually to be relied upon for keeping her promises — had come in two hours before, and gone quietly up to bed, without disturbing him. So no one was aware that there had been the long interval when she was neither in the hop-room nor in her pale-blue iron bunk. And, having no suspicions, it had never even occurred to Mrs. Norris to look at the frock which Marian had worn, and which — stained and crumpled in a way which might have caused her to wonder and to question, had she seen it — was hanging well back in the closet, out of sight.

There had been no sign of illness the

night before — very much on the contrary, in fact. Mrs. Norris had gone into Marian's room, before going to bed, as she always did, and what little of the towsled fair head had showed above the counterpane had been so still as to suggest peaceful sleep. So Mrs. Norris had been satisfied.

Yet, by morning, the trouble was already serious. Whereupon Mrs. Norris jumped at her own conclusions. Marian, she decided, had been overheated with dancing when she had gone out from the hop-room. "You were, were you not, dear?" she asked.

Marian nodded her head and made some unintelligible sound in her hot and swollen throat. It was quite true that she had been very warm when she had slipped out of the back door of the post hall.

Also — she had stood for an hour in the snow, without her overshoes, on the day of the fire.

Mrs. Norris was satisfied. Certainly here were reasons enough for any amount of chills and fever and sore throat. When the doctor came in she explained to him her idea of the causes, and Marian, lying listening and speechless, felt guilty to the last degree. She was not *telling* a fib, to be sure, but she was consenting to one, and it troubled her very much — even more than the pain.

Yet even if she could have spoken so as to be understood, how could she have set her mother and the doctor right without telling on Creighton and undoing nearly all that she had done for him? The tears came into her eyes. It was a very complicated world, and, just now, a

very wretched one. Yet only the night before she had been having such a good time. And here was the doctor saying now that her case might possibly prove grave and that she must have the very best of care.

This in itself was bad enough. But there was more, of which Marian was not allowed to know. Haggarty was in the guard-house, and upon the most serious of charges. He had been absent from his post on guard, and had had no satisfactory account to give of himself.

"I can't tell ye, Captain," he had said to his troop commander, mournfully, but with resolution. "I'll have to watch the gulls at Alcatraz for a few years, I guess. I swear to ye, sor, that my reason was a good one — that it wasn't no discredit to me. You'll believe that, won't ye, sor?"

He was fairly wistful as he asked it, the toughened old Irishman of many scouts. He waited for Captain Norris's answer, watching his face; and suddenly his own face changed.

"You ain't disbelieving me, Captain?" he pleaded, "sure ye ain't?" His eyes were growing horrified.

It was more than the Captain could stand. "No, Haggarty, no, of course not," he forced himself to say.

Haggarty looked relieved. "I wouldn't have deserved that, sor," he said.

If Captain Norris had gone back on him, Haggarty would have felt that the worst thing possible had befallen him. As it was, Marian herself had not confided in him; he was under arrest for the blackest of military offences, the record of all those years of honorable service was wiped out.

"'YOU AIN'T DISBELIEVING ME, CAPTAIN? SURE YE AIN'T?'"

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It would only have needed that Captain Norris should have doubted his given word. Then the world would have held nothing further for Haggarty.

"But see here, Haggarty," had argued Captain Norris, "you mustn't be an old fool. I believe you. But you don't think that that sort of justification is going to go down with a court-martial, I suppose?"

Haggarty shook his head. "It's the only one they're going to be likely to get, sor," he said doggedly. And beyond that there was nothing to be had from him.

If Haggarty was unhappy, Captain Norris was, as well. "I'd almost rather the whole blooming troop had mutinied, than have had Haggarty come to this," he said to his wife. "And I'd like to know," he added, "what kink he has got into his old head, anyway. He might trust me

with his secret, whatever it is — even if he doesn't want to tell the court. I might be able to help the old codger out, to some extent."

"You might suppose," was Mrs. Norris's suggestion, "that there was some girl in the case, if it weren't that we've never heard of his taking the slightest notice of one."

Captain Norris scoffed at the idea. "Haggarty in love! Why, Haggarty hasn't had any affection to spare for any other feminine being since the day that Marian was born. She's the only 'best girl' he's ever had. No; it's not a love affair." Mrs. Norris shook her head. Things were certainly about as bad as they well could be, it seemed to her just then.

But they were capable of becoming even worse — and presently they did.

On the outskirts of the reservation there lived a man by the name of Lowinsky. His name was believed to be Polish, but his nationality was an unsettled affair. By his own accounts — which varied at various times — the blood running in his veins was of so mixed a quality that he was generally known, about the post, as the Franco-Prussian-Anglo-Roman-Greco-Russian.

Lowinsky kept a small ranch in the creek bottom, and furnished the garrison with such vegetables as the post gardens did not grow, or grow in sufficient quantities. It was commonly believed that this was not his only way of gaining a livelihood. It seemed to matter very little to him whether he sold vegetables or not, and very often he failed to put in his appearance with his wagon, for days at a time.

But what his other sources of income were, nobody seemed to know. Only they were not thought to be especially creditable.

The Franco-Prussian-Anglo-Roman-Greco-Russian was not the most pleasant of persons. Nobody in the garrison fancied him very much, and the consequence was that the joy of the soldiers was very great when a civilian was found in the town some miles away, wearing a couple of the very things that had disappeared so mysteriously from the "L" Troop barracks. He admitted that he had bought them from Lowinsky. The watch of Ewing, the recruit, was amongst them. The market-gardener with the shifty eyes would be kept off the reservation in future. That was a foregone conclusion. But there would probably be more results than just that.

When the news was reported to the commandant, the Second Lieutenant of "L" Troop and the Sheriff from the county seat drove together in a buckboard to the Lowinsky vegetable ranch. They found the rancher at home, and they found a number more of the things, that had been missing from the barracks, in his log cabin. All that lacked was the money.

The account which Lowinsky gave of how he had come by it all was not satisfactory either to the Lieutenant or to the Sheriff. He was allowed to lock up his cabin and feed his stock. Then he had to get into the buckboard with the other two and drive back to the post, looking very uncomfortable and with his queer eyes shifting more than ever.

But he was sharp enough, in his way. He knew that he had made mistakes in what

he had already said. So he decided that unless he should be obliged to, he would not say anything more.

It was a short drive to the garrison; but while he took it — sitting stolidly on the back seat of the buckboard, beside the county officer — he made up his mind to several things.

He knew very well that not one of the soldiers — excepting perhaps Creighton — had any use or liking for him. For that matter, he had none for them. Yet there was one to whom he owed a particular grudge. Nearly all the men had teased him, a good many had played practical jokes upon him, and several had done worse than that. But there was still the one whom he hated above all these. It was a certain old Irishman who had come upon him one day, in the hollow, back of the officers' quarters, and had found

him pelting, with stones and broken glass from a dump heap, a lame puppy which belonged in the post gardens.

The Irishman had crept up behind him quietly. Lowinsky had not heard. He had been enjoying himself too much, chuckling over the yelps of the poor little animal which was dragging itself away as fast as it could go. The first he had known of anybody's presence had been when he felt the big stone that struck him between the shoulders. The Irishman's aim was good, and he could throw stones and broken glass considerably farther than the Franco-Prussian-Anglo-Roman-Greco-Russian himself. So Lowinsky was pelted all the while that he was covering a full hundred yards uphill, bent almost double, with his arms protecting his head. He had not only been pretty well bruised, but he had had several

cuts, as well, and one or two of them had left scars.

He had never forgiven the Irishman; though the latter had, always after, met him with a grin. He had answered the grin with a dark scowl. But he had had no chance to get even. Now, however, he had. And he meant to use it. He was sure to be punished in one way or another himself. He was quite prepared for that. But at least he would draw the Irishman into it and have him punished too.

So he answered Captain Norris's questions glibly enough — much more glibly than he had answered in his own log cabin. It was not by any means the same story he had told the Sheriff and the Second Lieutenant, that he told the Captain. But that was a small matter and did not much trouble him. He was hardly even shamefaced over it.

No, he had not known that the things he had bought had been stolen ones, he said. How should he have known? He had supposed all soldiers were honest. Yes, it had been a soldier who had brought the things to him; oh! yes. Who? Must he tell? He need not tell at present unless he chose to, Captain Norris answered him. He might do as he liked about that.

But the rancher was not going to let his one chance slip like this. "I will tell you," he hastened. And he told.

Captain Norris made no sign. It was quite impossible to guess how he was taking it. He merely nodded his head shortly.

"That will do," he said; "we won't want you here any longer just now." So Lowinsky and the Sheriff went out.

When they were left alone, the Lieutenant looked at the Captain, and the Captain

looked at the Lieutenant. The Captain shook his head again. Then he got up from his chair, walked over to the hearth, and stood with his back to the fire. He was silent, studying the fringe of the rug. In a few minutes more he shook his head once again. The matter was evidently beyond words.

Just then Mrs. Norris came into the room. She looked even more worried than she had looked all the rest of the day. Marian, she told her husband, was getting a little better — she could speak fairly well now, and she was asking to see Haggarty.

"What shall I do?" Mrs. Norris wanted to know. "I can't tell her that he is in the guard-house. It would simply break her heart, even if she were well. As it was now, it might make her dangerously ill. The doctor has said she is not

to be excited — that she must be kept as quiet as possible."

The Captain hesitated. "Tell her," he said, "that I say Haggarty has got something else to do besides neglecting his duty to run at the beck and call of girls. It's contrary to all good order and military discipline. Besides, she's too big to be sending for him when she's ill in bed. She can't get over treating Haggarty as though she were still about four years old. Just tell her Haggarty isn't going to be sent for."

The Captain was cross. It seemed to him that everything was going wrong in the most maddening way. Mrs. Norris went to carry the message upstairs. It was rather severe, but it would not be so hard on Marian, after all, as the truth itself.

There was a ring at the front door-bell. The Captain walked to the window, humming the words from the opera, —

"To thee, fair moon, I sing; bright regent of the heavens,
Say — why is everything either at sixes or sevens?"

He glanced out and saw the first sergeant of the troop standing on the porch.

"It's Allison," he remarked to the Lieutenant, setting his lips tightly. "I wonder what's wrong now. 'It never rains but it pours,'" he quoted, as he went to open the door himself.

He stood in the hallway, talking a little while. Then he came back, for a minute, into the sitting room.

"You didn't happen to give that fellow Creighton — the recruit, you know — a mounted pass, did you?" he inquired.

"I?" queried the Lieutenant, surprised, "why, no."

The Captain went out again into the hall. Presently the door was shut, the sergeant went down the steps, and Captain Norris took up his stand in front of the fire again.

"Well," he said, with the accent of resignation, "Creighton's lit out, I expect."

"What!" demanded the Lieutenant, incredulous. "You don't mean that nice, smooth-faced kid who thought he was going to win his shoulder knots some day?"

"That's whom I mean," the Captain made answer. "His chances of shoulder knots are slim from now on, by the looks of it. Seems that about half an hour before Lowinsky was brought in he was around all right. He was sitting on 'F' company porch with a lot of men who had been playing football. They were talking about the finding of Ewing's watch

and the other things that were on that citizen. Those things get around in the most surprising hurry in the barracks. Creighton didn't seem very much interested, Allison says — looked as if he were thinking about something else. He got up pretty soon and walked away. By and by he showed up at the corrals with a mounted pass gotten up in good style, all O.K. Here it is — you can see for yourself." He tossed it to the Lieutenant. "You'd swear that it was my signature, wouldn't you, though?"

The Lieutenant examined it. "You certainly would," he agreed. "Took pains to get it up in approved style, didn't he?"

"Well," finished the Captain, going over and taking back the pass, folding it carefully, and putting it in the pocket of his

blouse, "he got his *caballo*, saddled it deliberately, told some cock-and-bull story as to riding over to town to carry a message about Lowinsky to the judges for me, and went off, as cool and collected as you please. He's got a good start," he added. "It's almost dark now. They won't catch him to-night, if they do at all."

The Lieutenant had nothing to say.

"Great troop I've got — now, isn't it?" inquired the disgusted Captain. "Nice, respectable, military kind of a troop. I ought to be proud of it."

There was another silence. The Captain thought of something, abruptly.

"See here," he said, "I wish you'd just look over a requisition — I've got to go over to the Commanding Officer's. You give it a glance before I get back. I'll bring you the blanks."

He went into the dining room, to the desk, drew a key-ring from his pocket, and unlocked the second drawer. There followed a rattling of money. He came back with the requisition paper in his hand, and a most perplexed frown on his brow.

"I wonder what the mischief is happening to me now!" he said. "The troop only needs a crazy captain to be about perfect, and I must be going *loco*. The last time I was at that troop-fund box — nearly a month ago — there were only big silver pieces in it, large ones, — four-bits and dollars. Now it's half full of quarters and dimes and stuff, — regular 'chicken-feed,' — but the amount's all right."

"Guess you're mixed," said the Lieutenant, cheerfully, not paying much attention, and already looking over the paper.

"You ought not to have much cash kicking around that drawer, though. It's too easy to get into, and burglary seems to be growing to be the style."

The Captain accepted it without reply. He was inclined to think that perhaps the Lieutenant was right. But the change of the coins puzzled him. He went off to the Commanding Officer's.

First call for retreat was sounding when he came back. Mrs. Norris met him in the hall.

"Marian's crying because you won't let her see Haggarty," she said; "I'm afraid it's bad for her fever, too. She says she's got something to tell him about. It can't be very important, of course," she reasoned.

"Oh! I know what it is," said the harassed Captain; "she wanted to talk to him about the stealing of those things

from the barracks. It's too late now. She'd better stop crying about it."

"It's because she's ill that she's so childish, I suppose," her mother excused her.

"Well," said the Captain, taking a resolution and making the plunge, "it'll be many a long day before she sees Haggarty again, I expect. I'm afraid Haggarty has gone to the dogs, this late in life."

"Anything worse?" asked Mrs. Norris; "anything worse than last night, that is?"

"Not worse," said her husband. "It couldn't be worse, very well. But it's more of it. You've heard me speak of the things stolen from the barracks? Well — I didn't tell you to whom I found that suspicion was pointing, even then."

Mrs. Norris was growing pale. Her husband went on. "You needn't let

Marian know yet awhile; but we've found the things. They were, some of them, on a citizen who had bought them from Lowinsky, and the rest of them in Lowinsky's hut. Lowinsky says he bought them from a soldier, in his turn. And he says — now mind you keep it from Marian — he says the soldier was Haggarty."

CHAPTER VIII

The two invalids of the household were amusing themselves. Mrs. Norris had constructed an ingenious arrangement of strings and pulleys between the room in which Marian sat up in bed, with a bandaged throat and innumerable shawls around her; and that other room in which Louis Beveridge was propped up, slowly getting back to health, and shedding, one by one, his bandages.

By means of the string and pulleys they were sending notes back and forth. Each was provided with a pencil and pad and each was having quite as enjoyable a time as the circumstances would permit. The notes were short but very numerous.

The pulley kept squeaking pretty steadily. There was a tremendous deal to be asked and told about. Louis was doing most of the asking, and Marian was giving him information concerning the happenings of that fortnight during which he had been unconscious of all that was going on in the garrison.

It was a varied budget of news. The Hot Springs outbreak had amounted to just nothing at all. The detachment of "D" Troop was long since back. The Indians had returned to the reservation and had done no harm beyond stealing and driving off ranch stock.

"I'm sorry," wrote Marian, "but it was not the season of the year to expect a really good outbreak. We'll try to give you one before you go back East, though. It won't do for you to miss anything."

The damage to the Beveridge quarters was already being repaired. "And you probably know that your uncle lost his pocket-book with fifty dollars in it." — The hop had proved a great success, "but I had to go at ten o'clock." — An "L" Troop horse had had the blind staggers and had had to be shot. Also Haggarty had taught Puggy-Wuggy to sit up — and Louis might make him perform his trick at any time. So it ran.

Then Marian asked a question on her own account. What had been the warning against Creighton, begun in the quartermaster's corral and never finished?

There was a longer pause than usual in the squeaking of the pulleys. Louis was writing out his answer, and it was rather long. Then he pinned the folded sheet of paper to the cord, and it went

sliding along to the other room. Marian unpinned and unfolded it and read.

When she had finished, she sat looking straight in front of her. She was seeing a great many things from a new point of view. To more matters than one her eyes were being opened very wide. Her faith in her own judgment had been tottering a good deal of late. It now fell with a great crash.

So this was the man for whom she had gone through so much uneasiness and had come so near a serious illness — a forger and a thief!

By and by she wrote another note to Louis. "Are you absolutely sure of all that?" she asked in it.

"Dead sure," was the confident reply. "He was in my father's office. I ought to know." And then there followed a few

more details, — how Mr. Beveridge had hushed the matter up and paid back the amount himself to give young Levering another chance. "Father had known his mother before she died, and she was a very decent sort of a woman. So he did it for her sake more than for Levering's," he wrote.

The next note brought an outline of Levering's life from the time he had been expelled from public school for unruliness and dishonesty until he had left New York, promising Mr. Beveridge faithfully that he would be good for evermore. "We'll see how he'll keep his promise," Louis finished.

But Marian had already seen. There was no need of Louis knowing that, however. Instead, the twinegram carried another question. "You say that Creighton's

— Levering's — mother is dead. Hasn't he any family?"

"Not a human," came back the prompt reply. "Hasn't had since he was about fourteen years old. He was an only child, and his mother was a widow — that's one reason father was sorry for him."

Marian thought of the mother and the family of helpless ones about whom she had heard the pathetic tale of woe that afternoon in the troop corral.

But there remained still one thing unexplained. There was still a loophole of escape — the shadow of a chance that Louis might yet be mistaken and she herself right. She reminded him of it. "Creighton never seemed to recognize you," she suggested.

"Don't you worry," came the scribbled answer. "He recognized me jolly well,

and it's Sam Patch himself he had rather have had around the post than my humble self."

Thereafter, for a while, there was a pause. The voice of the pulley was no more heard in the house. The invalids were both taking a rest.

Marian was tracing out the course of a long crack in the calcimining of the ceiling, while she lay back and pondered many things. And the meditations were not so pleasant but that she was glad to have them interrupted, as presently they were.

There was a step in the hallway, and Martha Lorrimer came into the room. She had brought back some sewing she had been doing for Mrs. Norris. And she had come upstairs, she explained, because the cook had told her to, and Mrs. Norris was with some one in the sitting room.

Marian had always liked Martha. They had been stationed together at intervals, since Marian had been three years old and Martha five. And they had played together in their childhood days. The time for that was past of course, now that the Sergeant-major's daughter was a woman and the officer's daughter fast becoming one. But the friendship was still sincere.

There was something wrong with Martha now, and Marian saw it at once. The face beneath the mass of deep auburn hair was very pale, and there was a look about the eyes which suggested that they might have been open all night. The mirror had reflected to Marian something that same look two or three times within the last few weeks, and she guessed at once the meaning of it.

"What is the matter, Martha?" she asked.

Martha laid the things she had brought upon a chair. "The matter?" she said carelessly. Then she walked over to a window and stood looking out.

"Yes," insisted Marian, "what is it?"

"Oh! nothing," said Martha.

Marian played the spoiled invalid now with some success. "Martha," she commanded, "come here to me."

Martha did not move.

"If you don't," warned Marian, "I will get up and go to you, and that might be bad for me." She meant it. The other girl knew well enough that she did. She had a clear recollection of a certain day, long gone by, when a very small yellow-haired toddler, in despair because a somewhat larger red-haired toddler refused to play house in a beautiful packing-box, had threatened to eat the orange-

colored berries that grew on certain bushes on the parade. The berries were supposed to be poisonous, and the yellow-haired one had often been told she would die if she were to put them in her mouth. But she had eaten three of them just the same, determined to end a life which was worth nothing unless her very best friend would make up and play house with her.

That the berries had had no especial effect one way or another had not been the fault of the self-willed Marian. She had kept her word then, and she would probably do so now. And, as she said, if she did, it might be bad for her.

Martha left the window, therefore, and took the chair by the side of the bed.

"Are you worried?" asked Marian.

"And if I were," evaded Martha, "what could you do about it?"

But Marian was not to be side-tracked. "Is your mother ill?" she inquired. Martha shook her head. "Or your father?" The dark head was shaken again.

Marian was silent for a moment. She remembered what she had heard from her own father and the Second Lieutenant. She reached out her hand from under the bedclothes and laid it upon Martha Lorrimer's.

"Has anything happened to — Creighton?" she asked.

The tears came on Martha's long lashes. But her voice hardly shook. "Didn't you know about him?" she asked.

"Know about him?" said Marian. "Know what?"

"Didn't you know that he deserted last night?"

It was not only quickly that Marian sat up — it was with a spring.

"Deserted!" she demanded in a low tone. "Not really deserted?"

But it seemed that it was "really deserted" when Martha had given her the particulars. And the men who had gone out after him had not yet returned.

"Do you hope he will get away?" asked Marian, watching the white, young face, half in sympathy, half with the curiosity of a girl interested in a romance.

"Do you think I would want to have him brought back, as if he was a kind of a criminal, a thief, or something? Do you think I would like to see him lined up with the other prisoners in the guard-house?"

But why had he done it? asked Marian. Why had he deserted? Martha turned to her quickly.

"It's just that I can't possibly imagine," she said. "He was getting along so well.

He hadn't had any trouble with the men. He hadn't been sick, he hadn't even had anything to do that he didn't like — policing or anything."

Only the morning before, she went on with the confession, he had talked about how well he was going to like the service, and what he would do when he should get to be an officer.

"Were you," Marian hesitated, "were you going to be married to him if he had gotten to be an officer?" Of course they both understood that the chance of that was a thing of the past.

"He said so," answered Martha. There was the deepest disappointment in her tone. Marian had a sudden feeling that it was more that disappointment than anything else which had kept the girl awake the night before and had brought the tears to

her big gray eyes just now. To have been the wife of an officer — the pretty daughter of the Sergeant-major might well have looked forward to that. And she naturally did not seem to realize that she would have been doomed to disappointment sooner or later, in any case. But Marian, seeing those things from the standpoint of the officers, did. And she thought the disappointment was better now than by and by. Yet she could not help feeling a little sorry that the romance she had come upon was not much more than a half-childish ambition to be a fine lady. Martha would forget it very soon no doubt, and she would marry some one else and be perfectly happy.

"And you didn't know he was going to skip out?" asked Marian. Her expressions were often ones picked up from Haggarty.

Of course she had not known — Martha was a little cross at the question. It was silly on the face of it. "If he'd been going to tell any one, you don't suppose it would have been me." She stood up and began to button her coat. "Oh! well — there are plenty of others," she consoled herself.

Marian knew that it was true enough. Martha was much too pretty to lack admirers in an eight-company post.

"You won't tell anybody?" she asked.

"No," answered Marian. And it did not so much as occur to Martha to exact a promise. She had yet to know of Marian breaking her word.

She stopped at the door and turned back a little way. "Ain't it too bad about poor Haggarty?" she said, thinking for the first time of other troubles than her own.

"Haggarty?" questioned Marian. "Why,

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what about Haggarty? Is he ill? Or has he—" she smiled at the idea, "has he deserted, too?"

Martha was open-mouthed with astonishment. "Don't you know?" she asked. Then it began to dawn on her what she had perhaps done, and she flushed. "Maybe they didn't want to tell you," she said. "I never thought about that."

"But what is it?" Marian stuck to it, eager and excited.

"Oh! nothing much," the other told her, thoroughly frightened and confused. "I must be going home," she added, and hurried away without another word.

It was only a moment after that Marian heard the front door open and her father's footsteps in the hall. She made one great effort to bring her voice to something louder than a croaking whisper. Then she called.

"Coming!" cried Captain Norris — and was coming, indeed, three stairs at a time. The anguish of her strained, hoarse voice had frightened him. He thought she must be in some dire distress.

"What's the matter?" he demanded, very much out of breath. He was not sure what he had expected to see — but it had certainly not been merely his daughter sitting up in bed, safe and sound.

"What's the trouble, sir?" called Louis Beveridge's anxious voice, from the end of the hall. He, too, had heard the call.

"Nothing — apparently," answered the Captain, rather dryly.

"Yes, there is, too," contradicted Marian, the whisper hoarser than before, if anything. "What has happened to Haggarty?"

Captain Norris's face changed. His expression was blank. "Who told you

that anything has?" he asked, gaining time.

"Martha Lorrimer did," she answered, "and I want to know."

"He's in the guard-house, then," said the Captain, taking his seat by her bed. He meant to break it to her as gently as possible. But she was not to be headed off. Why was Haggarty in the guard-house?

"Well," temporized her father, — then came out with the truth without further delay, "well, he was absent from his post night before last, when he was on guard — when I was officer of the day."

That was the certainty. He told her of it. But the even more dreadful suspicion he kept to himself. It had not, as yet, been proven that Haggarty was a thief as well — though there could be little reasonable doubt of it, to one who knew

the facts. Still, until it was proven, there was no use in bothering Marian with it.

"What time was it that he was absent?" Marian asked evenly. It was hardly the way her father had expected her to take it, and he could not see what the time could matter to her, but he told her.

"Do you know why it was?" she went on.

"No," answered Captain Norris, "and he refuses to tell."

"Then I'll tell," said Marian. "It was because he was bringing me home."

It flashed across the Captain's mind that she might be in a fever — might be wandering. Yet there were certainly no signs of it. She was trembling hard, but that was all. He knitted his brows. "What on earth are you talking about?" he asked.

She told him.

He listened to the story with a face changing from astonishment to wrath. Surely, in all his army life, it was quite the most extraordinary, unlikely, undesirable tale he had ever heard. It was outrageous.

She finished. Then he spoke.

"And why, may I ask, did you tell Haggarty not to let me know?" Marian had seen her father angry, but never so angry as he was now. She hesitated. "Answer me!" said the Captain, shortly.

If he had thought the first story dreadful and extraordinary, this one seemed nothing less than totally impossible. Surely no such doings had ever been known of an officer's daughter before. But he waited to the end.

"So you knew that a private had stolen my troop funds, and yet you took

it upon yourself to keep the fact from me and to manage the affair alone? You met an enlisted man on the porch and in the corrals and in the corner of a building by night — and finally you ended up by getting into serious trouble and lasting disgrace an old fellow who has been your faithful friend ever since you were born? Is that what I am to understand?"

Marian had managed to finish the story, but now she had quite broken down. She was sobbing hard and miserably. She could only nod her head.

Captain Norris sat, for a time, without speaking.

"Well, you *have* made a mess of it," he said finally. "Did you get *all* the money back?"

"Yes," she wailed; "he sent, sent E-east for it — to a friend."

"You know, I suppose, that he has deserted — this man for whom you have ruined Haggarty?"

"I know it," sobbed Marian.

"Perhaps, as you were on such excellent terms with him, he confided in you where he intended to hide?"

But that was something she did not know. Who, he asked, had informed her of Creighton's desertion? She told him. A light came into the Captain's eyes, but Marian's own were covered by her hands, and she did not see.

"Can Martha give us any clew to his whereabouts?" he asked.

"I — I don't think so," murmured Marian, brokenly; "she said — said she didn't know."

"And have you realized," he inquired, going back to the other subject, "have you

realized what this is going to mean? It is going to mean that you have got to testify before the court-martial that tries Haggarty, — that you have got to do a thing I never before heard of any officer's daughter being obliged to do? You will be mixed up in the trial of an enlisted man; and very much mixed up in it. It's simply disgraceful, that's what it is."

There was another pause, filled by sobbings.

Puggy-Wuggy had been asleep in a streak of winter sunlight. He awoke and stretched himself, curling out his deep-pink tongue to an incredible length. Then he walked over to the bed and looked up.

His mistress was crying. That was a game she often played just to tease him. He objected to it very much. He studied her and her father inquiringly. But Cap-

tain Norris had other things besides small dogs about which to concern himself just then. Puggy-Wuggy looked back at Marian, and his face puckered distressedly.

"Wap!" he said.

But Marian did not heed him, and Captain Norris only motioned him away impatiently. Puggy-Wuggy mistook the meaning of the movement. He thought it referred to that last trick he had learned from the master of his most detested enemy, Skeezicks. So he tried to be obliging and obey. He sat up.

Now it was by no means easy for him to sit up without anybody to give him a lift. But he was a well-intentioned little dog. He wavered from side to side, and his bit of tongue stuck out in the effort. His black countenance was the very picture

of worry and woe. Yet nobody noticed him. He essayed a modest whine.

It had its effect. His master looked and saw a small, dark, Willoughby pug — sprawled as to hind legs, uncertain as to front ones — the embodiment of unhappiness and of noble endeavor to do as he was bid, though he should be disjointed in the act.

It was very funny. Captain Norris smiled. Puggy-Wuggy collapsed all in a heap, regained his normal position, and wagged his tail. Captain Norris leaned over and rubbed his round head.

Marian had missed all that had gone before, but she saw this last, and she saw that her father's anger was a little — a very little — mollified. He rose to his feet and stood looking down at her.

"I hope you see now," he said, a trifle

"He rose to his feet, and stood looking down at her."

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less severely (for she was such a forlorn-looking, tearful little girl, after all), "I hope you see now what comes of it when girls meddle in official matters and try to manage other people's affairs, — when they attempt to use their own judgment with regard to things they have no business to meddle in."

"I know," she agreed, all penitence, "but you've got the money back now, and that part's all right. What I'm thinking about is Haggarty, my poor old, nice old Haggarty. Isn't there anything at all that can be done for him? Couldn't you let him off if you wanted to?"

"No," her father told her, "I cannot. It doesn't lie with me. He will have to stand trial. There's no other way for it."

"And how about the Commanding Officer?" she clung to hope; "couldn't he?"

But the Commanding Officer was without power too, it seemed.

"No. You have sacrificed a faithful old friend to the first recruit who has come along," Captain Norris said, "and Haggarty's case is likely to be a serious one."

CHAPTER IX

The twine telegraph was busy and squeaking again, and the small pieces of paper pinned to it were going back and forth between Louis's room and Marian's.

Louis had written, "What's the rumpus?" Not that there had been any "rumpus," nor even so much as a raised tone of voice since Marian had called to her father, excepting only Puggy-Wuggy's one inquiring bark. It was merely a figure of speech. But the very silence had seemed to Louis ominous.

He had noticed that when Marian and her father were together for any length of time there was usually the sound of merriment. Now, however, there was nothing

of the sort. Moreover, it had seemed to Louis that he had heard something suggestive of a sob. He waited with much impatience.

Then Captain Norris had left Marian's room and gone downstairs. Whereupon Louis had promptly forwarded his inquiry. Marian rubbed the tears from her eyes with the corner of the sheet. Her handkerchief was mislaid, and she had not the heart to look for it just then. A stray sob still shook her shoulders from time to time, and her writing told of a trembling hand.

"Haggarty's in the guard-house, and Creighton deserted last night," was her reply. It was short, but it held a long tale of woe. She was learning her lesson; she was being so over-cautious now that nobody could possibly accuse her of med-

dling. She did not intend to give even Louis any more information than just that, which any one might know. It struck Louis that way too. He was not, by any means, satisfied with knowing that which anybody might know. He wanted to hear particulars. Marian, however, had reached the limit of what she meant to tell. Nobody should ever, ever again accuse her of mixing herself up in official affairs. She advised Louis to ask his uncle or somebody else.

Then she subsided miserably among the pillows and stared up at the crack in the ceiling, and wondered if any one had ever been so unhappy as she was. If only she could have made some great big sacrifice to have gotten Haggarty out of the guardhouse! But great big sacrifices made all at once can very rarely help us to undo

the harm already done. If she could but get word to him and tell him how sorry she was. Only she did not dare to even suggest such a thing to her father now. She could merely hope that he would, perhaps of his own accord, let Haggarty know.

And to think that if only Haggarty had not been so faithful, if only he had at once told Captain Norris why he had been absent for those few minutes just at the wrong time, he never need have been sent to the guard-house at all. The Captain would have let it pass, and have said nothing about it.

But now he would have to be court-martialled, like any other military offender, who had done some disgraceful thing. Or else — her heart stopped short! — what had she heard them saying once that it could

be? "Death, or such other punishment as the court may direct." What if the court should be relentless? She conjured up terrible things.

Why, oh! why had she not been sent East to boarding-school long ago before she had had the chance to make all this trouble for one of her best friends, and for herself? She hoped they would send her now. Bad as it would be, she felt she deserved it. Yet it would be some little expiation for her sins, for all the harm she had done. Of course her father and mother would think so too. They were perfectly certain to send her away — after she should have testified at the court-martial (that dreadful humiliation which had never happened to any officer's daughter before). She hoped that they would — yes, she did. But nevertheless she turned

her face down upon the pillow again and wept at the dreary thought.

As for Louis Beveridge, *he* had had no severe lesson about interfering in official matters — and, being a civilian, he did not fully understand, anyway, what an unpardonable offence it was. He had no intention of being so circumspect as Marian had apparently grown to be all of a sudden. He smiled over her note. "Stubborn little person," he commented to himself. "If she says she won't tell, why, she won't. But we'll see if the Captain will."

Captain Norris had gone out. Mrs. Norris came upstairs, but she went straight to her daughter's room and closed the door behind her. Louis was consumed with curiosity. He had nothing else to occupy his mind.

By and by, however, the Captain returned. As he went along the hallway toward his own room, Louis spoke to him. The Captain had got back some of his usual good nature. He answered Louis's questions as far as he thought wise.

"Haggarty is in the guard-house because he was found absent from his post on guard," he said.

"Why was he absent?" Louis wanted to know. But that was one of the things that Captain Norris did not see fit to tell, as yet. "You'll find out, maybe, when the court-martial proceedings are made known."

His face clouded at the mere idea. Those proceedings would be filled with his daughter's name. Was Haggarty likely to be severely punished? Louis asked next. That, said the Captain, would depend upon the temper of the court.

There was evidently not much concerning the older soldier to be learned here. But perhaps concerning the recruit there was. Besides, in this case, Louis himself would have information to exchange.

"I don't know the first thing about Creighton," Captain Norris told him, "beyond the facts that he forged a mounted pass, got a horse from the stables, and skipped out just a little while before retreat. And he hasn't been found yet."

"Any money missing?" asked Louis.

Captain Norris looked at him sharply. "Not that I know of," he answered. "Why?"

"Only because when he lit out from my father's offices there was a forgery too, and some money gone. Thought it might have been so this time."

"The only money gone," said the Cap-

tain, "is the fifty dollars that was in your uncle's pocket-book. Of course Creighton may have taken that, — he was in and out of the house during the fire, — but it was hardly enough to be worth deserting with. And what's this about your father's offices?"

Louis told him. And he had reason to be satisfied with the effect of his little story. It was Captain Norris who did the questioning now, and Louis told all he knew.

"But if you were aware of all this from the first," suggested the former, "why didn't you tell me so before? It might have saved a deal of trouble."

"It wasn't any affair of mine, sir," said Louis. "My father wanted to give the fellow another chance in life, and there was no reason why I should have prevented

it. It never occurred to me that he would finish like this."

"And have you told any one else?" inquired the Captain, with a hint of anxiety.

"I told Miss Marian, sir, about two hours ago."

Captain Norris's eyebrows went up. So Marion had known it all the while she had been making her confession, and had never said a word about it! Certainly she could keep a confidence well — if not always wisely. And evidently she had not intended to be the means of dragging Louis into the unfortunate affair. He was angry enough with her — but still, he admired that. Louis broke in on his thoughts. "Would you mind telling where they have looked for Levering, sir?"

The Captain told him as much as he knew. "He isn't likely to go to the rail-

road, because we've telegraphed all the stations, and they're on the lookout for him. And there's not a town within fifty miles — except, of course, Mexican villages where they wouldn't be in the least likely to harbor him. Still, those villages will be searched, of course. And he can't be spending the time in the open, when the snow is still on the ground."

Louis delayed a moment. He had a suggestion to make, but he was afraid it might seem a trifle presumptuous for him to be suggesting these things to an old soldier. Still, he himself knew Levering, and Captain Norris did not.

"Don't you think, sir, they might find him somewhere very near home? That's a trick of his — to hide right close by. City fellows do that very often, you know — if they're sharp. He didn't get out of

town with the money he took from father. He lived on the very next street. We only found him by the merest accident."

It was evidently a suggestion worth considering. Captain Norris considered it. "I'll think about it," he said.

After a while he went into Marian's room. It was just possible that Marian would know something of his haunts or of his friends.

"There's that house on the edge of the reservation," she suggested; "but, of course, you've looked there."

"Yes," said her father.

"And then there's Lowinsky's *rancho*. I've seen him talking to Lowinsky a good many times."

It did not seem worth much, since Lowinsky's ranch was now deserted and its owner in jail, — which Marian, of course,

did not know. But there was the bare chance; and, perhaps, after all, it was worth taking.

So, by and by, a quartette of soldiers rode in the direction of the ranch. They approached it from all four sides — and Creighton had no chance of escape. He double-bolted the doors, then hid himself under a bunk, when he saw them coming.

The bolts were strong, but the sash of one of the windows was not. Creighton wanted to fight when he was dragged from under the bed, but he was one to four.

"Now, where's that horse you got under false pretences?" asked the corporal. It was tied out under the trees up the creek a way. The corporal's look was dreadful to see. In such weather as this a horse tied out a night and a day with no shelter! It had been fed, and there

was a blanket over it, Creighton tried to defend himself. A blanket! and the wind blowing a gale, and the ground all snow! "If you hadn't no other kind of decency, you might, anyways, have been decent to the poor, dumb brute." The corporal was a merciful man.

"Why didn't you put him in Lowinsky's empty corral?" he asked.

Creighton was flippant; he laughed, which the corporal thought in very bad taste, under the circumstances. "Because," he said, "the corral wouldn't have been empty then — and somebody might have passed by and noticed it."

They made Creighton guide them to the horse, which stood shivering, head and tail hanging limply, under a sycamore, in a knot of small, bare willows. It was hidden, but not at all protected from the wind

that swept down the valley and through the funnel of the bluffs on either side of the creek. They took it and Creighton back to the post.

CHAPTER X

MARIAN, a little comforted by her mother's sympathy, to be sure, but still very fairly miserable, was sitting up in bed, a shapeless bundle of wraps and bed-clothing, with only a pathetic face amid a tumble of light hair showing out. She was somewhat dejectedly teaching Puggy-Wuggy to perfect himself in Haggarty's trick, and encouraging him with pieces of cheese. In the intervals of rest she lectured him. "We've done poor, nice old Haggarty a great deal of wrong, you know," she explained. "We've disgraced him forever, I expect. He'll probably be sent to the military prison at Alcatraz, just as though he were a criminal. And it will be all

our fault, little dorglums." Certainly Puggy-Wuggy's countenance was mournful enough. But then it usually was. He resembled Haggarty in that. A mournful countenance had become a habit with him. It had nothing whatever to do with his own feelings, which were usually perfectly cheerful.

Marian went on. "So you and I must be nice to Skeezicks, to make up for it all as much as we possibly can. We must adopt him and treat him beautifully. He won't have to eat off the same plate with us." That she knew was an indignity that Puggy-Wuggy would much rather have died fighting than have submitted to in peace. "But we won't scrap with him any more — even if he is rather common. He can't help that, you know, and I'm sure he's really very kind-hearted and good to his

puppies. Of course he's ugly — but then," she observed Puggy-Wuggy critically, her head on one side, "but then, it's just possible," — a smile came, in spite of all her misery, — "it's just barely possible that he may not consider you so *very* handsome yourself."

Either Puggy-Wuggy resented this, or else he had lost hope of any more cheese. He unkinked his tail, walked away, and, turning about a great many times, curled up near the stove with a heavy sigh.

Marian echoed the sigh herself and lay back upon the pillows. She was thinking that the chances were she would not be allowed to care for Skeezicks — to do even that little for the Haggarty who had done so much for her; always supposing even that Skeezicks would consent to giving up a troop which did his will, and to living on

the officers' line. Skeezicks had no especial fondness for officers as a class. And they ran to thoroughbreds.

No, she would be sent back East to boarding-school. She was sure of it. She would not have Skeezicks, nor Puggy-Wuggy, nor Natchez, nor anything that made life worth living. To have been East with her family when her father was on leave, was one thing — and a very pleasant one. But to go there to a boarding-school — a boarding-school full of girls! There had never been many girls in Marian's life. She had liked those few, as a rule. But she was, nevertheless, inclined to look upon them as a good thing, of which one could get too much. A hundred of the loveliest city girls in the world were not worth her freedom, her lessons with her father and mother, Puggy-

Wuggy, Natchez, and all the rest she would probably have to forego now.

Tears — of self-pity they were this time — were slowly filling her eyes again.

And just then she heard her father coming up the stairs. He stopped by Louis Beveridge's door.

"Has your uncle told you that Creighton was found at Lowinsky's?" Marian heard him ask. Major Beveridge was in the room with his nephew.

Marian could not hear Louis's answer. But what she did catch was a certain unmistakable tone of satisfaction with something or other, in Captain Norris's voice.

Her own spirits went up straightway, she did not know just why.

"We found more than that, too," he said, and then he seemed to have gone on into

the room, and Marian could not hear any more.

He stayed for some time. But at length he came out and up the hall to Marian's door. His face did not express any noticeable satisfaction, certainly. He looked stern enough still. He closed the door after him, and sat down on the chair by the side of her bed.

"Well," he said to her, "Creighton is caught."

She nodded, but she did not answer. She waited, doubtfully, to see why he had come to tell her.

"They found him in Lowinsky's ranch. It had been shut up and locked after Lowinsky was arrested, but it seems that he had a key. And he's been there ever since." Still Marian waited in respectful silence.

"They brought him in," continued the Captain, "and they searched him. They found Major Beveridge's pocket-book upon him. Most of the fifty dollars was still in it." There was no comment from Marian.

"I didn't tell you," went on her father, "that Lowinsky was arrested last night because he was found to have some of the goods that had been stolen from the quarters in his possession — in the cabin. He said he had gotten them from Haggarty. Why he should have hit on Haggarty to lie about, I don't know — unless he had some grudge against him."

Marian did know, and she knew what the grudge was, too. She told her father.

"That's it, is it?" he said. "Well, it doesn't matter much now. Creighton has been trapped into confessing. It was he who took them. And so, when he heard

that Lowinsky was arrested, he saw his own finish, and he deserted. He has not," he stopped and looked at her gravely, — "he has not as yet admitted that he sold the things to Lowinsky to get the money to pay you back for the troop funds, as I suppose he did. But when it comes to the court-martial he undoubtedly will. You can see — I hope — the kind of undesirable notoriety you are in for."

She could see only too well. "Does he know that *you* know?" she asked. It seemed that he did not. "Then," she ventured, "mightn't it — if you don't mind my suggesting — mightn't it be a good idea to tell him that you know? He might try to spring it on you at the court-martial to make you feel uncomfortable, you see."

Captain Norris said he would think about it. He stood up. "He was a nice sort

of character, the man you picked out to champion. And, as it happens, if you'd asked the opinion of nearly any grown person in the post, you would have found that we all of us mistrusted the fellow instinctively. But you wanted to rely on yourself, you see, and this is the result."

"I'll ask next time, you may be sure," she said decidedly.

"I thought I'd tell you to relieve your mind about Haggarty's being a thief," he said. "You ought to have quite enough to bother you without that."

"I'm sure," answered Marian, woebegone and spiritless; "I'm sure I have."

Captain Norris was at the door. "Father," began Marian, then stopped. He turned back. "Couldn't you," she hazarded, "couldn't you, don't you suppose — not for me, you know, but for

Haggarty's sake, so that he wouldn't think me something dreadful and ungrateful — couldn't you let him know how I got to be in the telegraph-pole hole — and that I've told you he wasn't to blame?" She was scared at her own boldness, and waited with bated breath.

"He does know," said Captain Norris; and without waiting for her delighted thanks he went from the room.

He had not been gone five minutes and Marian had not finished explaining to Puggy-Wuggy that at least Haggarty was not a barracks thief after all, when Martha Lorrimer appeared in the doorway again.

"Your mother said I could come up," she told Marian. Then she stopped. "May I shut the door?" she asked.

"Surely," consented Marian.

Martha closed it and came to the bed-

side. "Did you know that Creighton is caught?" she asked.

"Yes," said Marian.

"Did you know that they found Major Beveridge's pocket-book on him, and that he told that he stole those things from the barracks?"

Marian was not going to commit herself as to that. But she wondered how the news had already gotten about.

Martha laughed and shrugged her shoulders. "You needn't tell if you don't want to," she said, "but I expect you knew,— or you'd have looked more surprised. It wasn't that I came to tell you, though," she was going resolutely now to some point. "What I want you to know is, that I'm glad they've caught him, and that I don't care for him any more — not that much." She snapped her fingers to express

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it. "I did a little," she admitted frankly, "but not now."

"I'm glad," — Marian reached out and took the soft white hand — "I'm very glad. You are a great *deal* too good for him, Martha," she said.

"I can only stay half a minute," Martha went on quickly. "Mrs. Norris says you've had too much excitement to-day. But I wish I could bring you some sort of good news about Haggarty. I'm afraid, though, it is going to go pretty hard with him. They all say so. I've been asking the men — and it's 'Death, or such other punishment as the court may direct,' you know."

Her intentions were doubtless the best in the world; it was only her little Irish way of loving a doleful effect. But when she was gone, poor Marian lay with

closed eyes, saying it over and over to herself.

"Death, or such other punishment as the court may direct."

CHAPTER XI

"'In the case of Private Timothy Haggarty, Troop "L" —th Cavalry, the finding and the sentence are approved,'" read Marian.

Her hands dropped in her lap, and the copy of the General Court-martial Order slipped to the floor. The last hope was gone.

The finding and sentence of the court which had tried Haggarty were approved, and the finding had been that Haggarty was guilty — the sentence, that he should be confined at hard labor in the post for the period of three months.

And there was no redress; there was no other court of appeal. Haggarty, in

spite of the recommendations of the officers of the court, must serve his three months of hard labor before the eyes of all the men. To be sure, the labor would probably be — instead of hard — extremely light. And it was better than "death," or Alcatraz Island. Yet it would break his proud old heart just the same. She was sure that it would. He had been so very vainglorious about his long years of honorable service.

Marian had had one last hope after that sentence of the court-martial, which had seemed to her so severe, for all that they might assure her it was merely nominal. She had hoped that the Department Commander would set things right. But now —

"Well," suggested Mrs. Norris, who sat calmly sewing, in a manner which

Marian could not but think was heartless to the last degree, "if I were you, I would see if there is anything further."

It could only be what Captain Norris was accustomed to call "piling on the agony," if there were. Nevertheless, Marian bent over listlessly and picked the sheet up.

"—'Finding and the sentence are approved,'" she read on, "'but in view of the fact that the prisoner quitted his post only to perform a heroic act'" — even Marian could not help a smile; she suspected the Department Commander of good-natured irony — "'and inasmuch as the offence was committed during a time of peace, the reviewing authority shares the evident view of the court and regards the offence as a technical one, and one which was inspired by a worthy mo-

tive. Therefore,'" Marian caught her breath, "'"'the sentence is REMITTED'"— it was all in large capitals that she read it. She was jumping up and down in her chair and her face was one big smile, "'"'and the prisoner will be RELEASED FROM ARREST and restored to duty.'"

"Isn't that bee-utiful?" she cried. "Isn't he just naturally a perfect Love?" Which was not what the Department Commander was considered, as a general thing.

"'"'The reviewing authority regrets that it was impossible to acquit Private Haggarty of even a technical offence (as the court would no doubt have been glad to have done), but this matter can never affect the soldier's record excepting to give a lustre to it.'"

There was nothing, absolutely nothing

in all the world, left for Marian to wish. It was a splendid, glorious, satisfactory earth, wherein everybody was nice and generous and a dear old thing — from the Department Commander himself down to, — oh! any one — unless it should happen to be Creighton, perhaps, who was now on his way to the Alcatraz prison.

Having hugged her mother to the detriment of the sewing materials, and having caught the thoroughly unwilling Puggy-Wuggy by his dainty front feet and dragged him around in a circle, then flung him up in the air several times, to his horror and terror, she went skipping to the window and looked out.

It certainly was a lovely post after all.

Dress parade was going on. The yellow plumes streamed, the polished steel flashed

white in the cold winter sunlight. The brass and the gold lace glistened.

The band was playing an inspiring march. It made one's feet and fingers go in spite of one's self. No wonder the solid ranks swung out and wheeled and faced so smoothly, as if — as Marian had explained to Martha Lorrimer once, ever so many years ago, when two small tots had stood hand in hand upon the board walk of another post, and had watched another dress parade — as if "all their legs had been one piece."

Louis Beveridge appeared coming down the line. Marian was sure he was coming to her house. Experience had justified her in believing that, nine times out of ten, he was. It is an easy habit to acquire in the army that of living at some other quarters about as much as you do at your own.

"He gave Marian the pleasure of telling him again."

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If Louis did not spend, at the very least, six hours, and have one meal at the Norrises' every day, there was something wrong.

"Here's Louis coming," suggested the now cautious Marian. "May I tell him, do you think?"

Mrs. Norris was of opinion that he would know it already. "He's probably coming to congratulate you, anyway. But you may tell him if he's still in ignorance. I expect it is a General Order, and public property."

Louis did know, but he gave Marian the pleasure of telling him over again.

"No!" he ejaculated. "You don't mean it? Toot the trumpet, sound the drums! What's the adjutant thinking about that he doesn't send the band over to serenade you, and the performer of the 'heroic act,' too?"

He took the sheet and read, "'Quitted his post to perform a heroic act,' 'this matter can never affect the soldier's record except to give lustre to it.' Gee whiz! Why, every old private in the service will be breaking his precious neck to get himself court-martialled for leaving his post. They'll be digging post holes, and setting figure-four traps to catch wandering damsels unawares. The wives and daughters of officers will be getting rescued every night of their lives, whether they want to or not. The regiments will turn hero to a man. Lustrous records will fairly dazzle the eyes of the War Department. The rooms where they are pigeon-holed — the records I mean, not the eyes — will be brilliant as with a thousand electric lights. A fire brigade will have to be in constant attendance to prevent spontaneous com-

bustion. And" — he stopped short, and observed her with great attention — "I have reason to fear that unless you are carefully looked after you will spontaneously combust yourself. Consider that shining countenance! Don't you think, Mrs. Norris, that there are signs of it?"

"I wish," answered Mrs. Norris, resignedly, "that you two children would either subside or go out and play."

"Great scheme!" approved Louis, heartily. "It's precisely what we will do. We'll go out and play. It's about five thousand eight hundred and ninety-three years since there has been a day so evidently intended for taking a horseback ride. You get on your habit, and I'll scare up Natchez and Dandy, and I'll race you from here to the reservation line."

"You won't," denied Marian, "unless

it's a walking race — and Natchez can beat at that. I was taught better than to start off my horse at the top of his speed — and Haggarty taught me. But we'll go for the ride."

So Louis went off for the horses, and Marian to put on her habit and to recall that other day not so long past when all the valley and the mountains had been white with two feet of dry and crunching snow, when the sky had been the very blue of the soldiers' overcoats, and the cold wind from off the great plains and the high peaks had swept the snow before it like fine white dust.

On that day, when the temperature had been as bitter as her own humiliation, she had testified before the court-martial which had tried Private Timothy Haggarty. It had been made as little unpleasant for her as

possible, but she had thought at the time that she must die of the mortification, even as it was.

And now, after all, it had come out right. She was forgiven. She was not even to be sent East to boarding-school — not for another year, at any rate; and then her mother would go on with her, and stay with her in whatever city the boarding-school might happen to be.

Haggarty, dear old devoted Haggarty, had come out with a name not only untarnished, but covered with "lustre."

The band was playing another march. It rang through the crisp wintry air, and set one's blood and one's eyes to dancing. Oh, yes, this was a glorious, splendid, satisfactory kind of world.

And Louis had Natchez and Dandy down at the mounting-block.

She rapped on the window-pane, and he, looking up, saw the radiant face with its aureole of fair hair under the round riding-cap.

"Coming," she called, nodding her head. He smiled and nodded too. Then she turned away and ran quickly down to join him.

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